











THE POETICAL WORKS  
OF  
WILLIAM B. YEATS

VOLUME I—LYRICAL POEMS



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WILLIAM B. YEATS

*IN TWO VOLUMES*

VOLUME I  
LYRICAL POEMS

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## PREFACE

WHEN I was in America two or three years ago, I lectured at the Irish College of San José, and as I went through the quadrangle to the lecture hall the moonlight fell among the palm trees. I remember how strange and foreign all that beauty seemed to me; and yet the lads I spoke to were moved, as I thought, by the imaginative tradition that would have moved them at home. It seemed to me that they knew the history and the ballad poetry as I did, and were moved as I had been at their age by Davis's "Lament for Owen Roe" or by Mangan's "Ode to the Maguire." I was able to forget the palm trees, and to say what I would have said to young men in Dublin or in Connacht. As I am looking over the proof sheets of these two books, where I have gathered

for the first time all of my poetry I have any liking for, San José comes into my head with the thought that I also have been true to that tradition as I understand it.

When I began to write, I belonged to a Young Ireland Society in Dublin, and wished to be as easily understood as the Young Ireland writers,—to write always out of the common thought of the people. I have put the poems written while I was influenced by this desire, though with an always lessening force, into those sections which I have called “Early Poems.” I read them now with no little discontent, for I find, especially in the ballads, some triviality and sentimentality. Mangan and Davis are not sentimental and trivial, but I became so from an imitation that was not natural to me. When I was writing the poems in the last of the three, the section called “The Rose,” I found that I was becoming unintelligible to the young men

who had been in my thought. We have still the same tradition, but I have been like a traveller who having when newly arrived in the city noticed nothing but the news of the marketplace, the songs of the workmen, the great public buildings, has come after certain months to let his thoughts run upon some little carving in its niche, some Ogham on a stone, or the conversation of a countryman who knows more of the "Boar without Bristles" than of the daily paper. When like that traveller grown unintelligible in the marketplace, I would explain myself, I have not been able always to convince the hearer that I have been no farther than to the old man who brings in his creels of turf upon a Saturday. But now I am half returning to my first ambition, for though I keep my new knowledge in my head, I am no longer writing for a few friends here and there, but am asking my own people to listen, as many as can find their way

into the Abbey Theatre in Dublin or some provincial one when our company is on tour. Perhaps one can explain in plays, where one has much more room than in songs and ballads, even those intricate thoughts, those elaborate emotions, that are one's self.

W. B. YEATS.

IN THE SEVEN Woods, July, 1906.

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# **EARLY POEMS**

I

***BALLADS AND LYRICS***

*The stars are threshed, and the souls are threshed from  
their husks.—WILLIAM BLAKE.*

To A. E.



TO SOME I HAVE TALKED WITH BY  
THE FIRE. A DEDICATION TO A  
VOLUME OF EARLY POEMS

While I wrought out these fitful Danaan  
rhymes,

My heart would brim with dreams about the  
times

When we bent down above the fading coals;  
And talked of the dark folk, who live in souls  
Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;  
And of the wayward twilight companies,  
Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,  
Because their blossoming dreams have never  
bent

Under the fruit of evil and of good;

6     *TO SOME I HAVE TALKED WITH*

And of the embattled flaming multitude  
Who rise, wing above wing, flame above  
flame,  
And, like a storm, cry the Ineffable Name;  
And with the clashing of their sword blades  
make  
A rapturous music, till the morning break,  
And the white hush end all, but the loud beat  
Of their long wings, the flash of their white  
feet.

## THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD

The woods of Arcady are dead,  
And over is their antique joy ;  
Of old the world on dreaming fed ;  
Gray Truth is now her painted toy ;  
Yet still she turns her restless head :  
But O, sick children of the world,  
Of all the many changing things  
In dreary dancing past us whirled,  
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,  
Words alone are certain good.  
Where are now the warring kings,  
Word be-mockers ? — By the Rood  
Where are now the warring kings ?

## 8 THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD

An idle word is now their glory,  
By the stammering schoolboy said,  
Reading some entangled story :  
The kings of the old time are fled.  
The wandering earth herself may be  
Only a sudden flaming word,  
In clangling space a moment heard,  
Troubling the endless reverie.

Then no wise worship dusty deeds,  
Nor seek ; for this is also sooth ;  
To hunger fiercely after truth,  
Lest all thy toiling only breeds  
New dreams, new dreams ; there is no  
truth  
Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,  
No learning from the starry men,

Who follow with the optic glass  
The whirling ways of stars that pass —  
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,  
No word of theirs — the cold star-bane  
Has cloven and rent their hearts in  
twain,  
And dead is all their human truth.  
Go gather by the humming sea  
Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell,  
And to its lips thy story tell,  
And they thy comforters will be,  
Rewarding in melodious guile,  
Thy fretful words a little while,  
Till they shall singing fade in ruth,  
And die a pearly brotherhood;  
For words alone are certain good:  
Sing, then, for this is also sooth.

10 *THE SONG OF THE HAPPY SHEPHERD*

I must be gone : there is a grave  
Where daffodil and lily wave,  
And I would please the hapless faun,  
Buried under the sleepy ground,  
With mirthful songs before the dawn.  
  
His shouting days with mirth were crowned ;  
And still I dream he treads the lawn,  
Walking ghostly in the dew,  
Pierced by my glad singing through,  
My songs of old earth's dreamy youth :  
But ah ! she dreams not now ; dream thou !  
For fair are poppies on the brow :  
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.

## THE SAD SHEPHERD

There was a man whom Sorrow named his  
friend,

And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,  
Went walking with slow steps along the gleam-  
ing

And humming sands, where windy surges  
wend :

And he called loudly to the stars to bend  
From their pale thrones and comfort him, but  
they

Among themselves laugh on and sing alway:  
And then the man whom Sorrow named his  
friend

Cried out, *Dim sea, hear my most piteous story!*  
The sea swept on and cried her old cry still,  
Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill;  
He fled the persecution of her glory  
And, in a far-off, gentle valley stopping,  
Cried all his story to the dewdrops glistening,  
But naught they heard, for they are always  
listening,  
The dewdrops, for the sound of their own  
dropping.

And then the man whom Sorrow named his  
friend,  
Sought once again the shore, and found a shell  
And thought, *I will my heavy story tell*  
*Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send*  
*Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;*  
*And my own tale again for me shall sing,*

*And my own whispering words be comforting*

*And lo! my ancient burden may depart.*

Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;

But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone

Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan

Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.

## THE CLOAK, THE BOAT, AND THE SHOES

“What do you make so fair and bright?”

“I make the cloak of Sorrow:  
O, lovely to see in all men’s sight  
Shall be the cloak of Sorrow,  
In all men’s sight.”

“What do you build with sails for flight?”

“I build a boat for Sorrow,  
O, swift on the seas all day and night  
Saileth the rover Sorrow,  
All day and night.”

“What do you weave with wool so white?”

“I weave the shoes of Sorrow,  
Soundless shall be the footfall light  
In all men’s ears of Sorrow,  
Sudden and light.”

## ANASHUYA AND VIJAYA

*A little Indian temple in the Golden Age.  
Around it a garden; around that the forest.  
ANASHUYA, the young priestess, kneeling  
within the temple.*

ANASHUYA. Send peace on all the lands and  
flickering corn. —  
O, may tranquillity walk by his elbow  
When wandering in the forest, if he love  
No other. — Hear, and may the indolent  
flocks  
Be plentiful. — And if he love another,  
May panthers end him. — Hear, and load our  
king

With wisdom hour by hour.—May we two stand,  
When we are dead, beyond the setting suns,  
A little from the other shades apart,  
With mingling hair, and play upon one lute.

VIJAYA [*entering and throwing a lily at her*].  
Hail ! hail, my Anashuya.

No : be still.

I, priestess of this temple, offer up  
Prayers for the land.

VIJAYA. I will wait here, Amrita.  
ANASHUYA. By mighty Brahma's ever rustling robe,

Who is Amrita ? Sorrow of all sorrows !  
Another fills your mind.

VIJAYA. My mother's name.

*Anashuya [sings, coming out of the temple].  
A sad, sad thought went by me slowly:*

*Sigh, O you little stars! O, sigh and shake  
your blue apparel!*

*The sad, sad thought has gone from me now  
wholly:*

*Sing, O you little stars! O sing, and raise  
your rapturous carol*

*To mighty Brahma, he who made you many as  
the sands,*

*And laid you on the gates of evening with his  
quiet hands.*

*[Sits down on the steps of the temple.]*

Vijaya, I have brought my evening rice;  
The sun has laid his chin on the gray wood,  
Weary, with all his poppies gathered round  
him.

VIJAYA. The hour when Kama, full of  
sleepy laughter,  
Rises, and showers abroad his fragrant arrows,  
Piercing the twilight with their murmuring  
barbs.

ANASHUYA. See how the sacred old fla-  
mingoes come,  
Painting with shadow all the marble steps:  
Aged and wise, they seek their wonted perches  
Within the temple, devious walking, made  
To wander by their melancholy minds.

Yon tall one eyes my supper; swiftly chase  
him

Far, far away. I named him after you.  
He is a famous fisher; hour by hour  
He ruffles with his bill the minnowed streams.  
Ah! there he snaps my rice. I told you so.

Now cuff him off. He's off! A kiss for  
you,

Because you saved my rice. Have you no  
thanks?

VIJAYA. [sings]. *Sing you of her, O first few  
stars,*

*Whom Brahma, touching with his finger,  
praises, for you hold*

*The van of wandering quiet; ere you be too  
calm and old,*

*Sing, turning in your cars,*

*Sing, till you raise your hands and sigh, and  
from your car heads peer,*

*With all your whirling hair, and drop tear  
upon azure tear.*

ANASHUYA. What know the pilots of the  
stars of tears?

VIJAYA. Their faces are all worn, and in  
their eyes

Flashes the fire of sadness, for they see  
The icicles that famish all the north,  
Where men lie frozen in the glimmering  
snow ;  
And in the flaming forests cower the lion  
And lioness, with all their whimpering cubs ;  
And, ever pacing on the verge of things,  
The phantom, Beauty, in a mist of tears ;  
While we alone have round us woven woods,  
And feel the softness of each other's hand,  
Amrita, while ——

ANASHUYA [*going away from him*]. Ah me,  
you love another,

[*Bursting into tears.*]

And may some dreadful ill befall her quick !

VIJAYA. I loved another; now I love no other.

Among the mouldering of ancient woods  
You live, and on the village border she,  
With her old father the blind wood-cutter;  
I saw her standing in her door but  
now.

ANASHUYA. Vijaya, swear to love her never more.

VIJAYA. Ay, ay.

ANASHUYA. Swear by the parents of  
the gods,  
Dread oath, who dwell on sacred Himalay,  
On the far Golden Peak; enormous shapes,  
Who still were old when the great sea was  
young;

On their vast faces mystery and dreams;

Their hair along the mountains rolled and  
filled

From year to year by the unnumbered nests  
Of aweless birds, and round their stirless  
feet

The joyous flocks of deer and antelope,  
Who never hear the unforgiving hound.

Swear!

VIJAYA. By the parents of the gods, I  
swear.

ANASHUYA [sings]. *I have forgiven, O new  
star!*

*Maybe you have not heard of us, you have  
come forth so newly,*

*You hunter of the fields afar!*

*Ah, you will know my loved one by his hunter's  
arrows truly,*

*Shoot on him shafts of quietness, that he may  
ever keep*

*An inner laughter, and may kiss his hands to  
me in sleep.*

Farewell, Vijaya. Nay, no word, no word;  
I, priestess of this temple, offer up  
Prayers for the land.                          [VIJAYA goes.]

O Brahma, guard in sleep  
The merry lambs and the complacent kine,  
The flies below the leaves, and the young mice  
In the tree roots, and all the sacred flocks  
Of red flamingo; and my love, Vijaya;  
And may no restless fay with fidget finger  
Trouble his sleeping: give him dreams of me.

## THE INDIAN UPON GOD

I passed along the water's edge below the  
humid trees,  
My spirit rocked in evening light, the rushes  
round my knees,  
My spirit rocked in sleep and sighs; and saw  
the moorfowl pace  
All dripping on a grassy slope, and saw them  
cease to chase  
Each other round in circles, and heard the  
eldest speak :  
*Who holds the world between His bill and made  
us strong or weak*  
*Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond  
the sky.*

*The rains are from His dripping wing, the  
moonbeams from his eye.*

I passed a little further on and heard a lotus  
talk:

*Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth  
on a stalk,*

*For I am in His image made, and all this  
tinkling tide*

*Is but a sliding drop of rain between His  
petals wide.*

A little way within the gloom a roebuck raised  
his eyes

Brimful of starlight, and he said: *The  
Stamper of the Skies,*

*He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray,  
could he*

*Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing  
like me?*

I passed a little further on and heard a  
peacock say:

*Who made the grass and made the worms and  
made my feathers gay,*

*He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all  
the night*

*His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots  
of light.*

## THE INDIAN TO HIS LOVE

The island dreams under the dawn  
And great boughs drop tranquillity ;  
The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,  
A parrot sways upon a tree,  
Raging at his own image in the enamelled  
sea.

Here we will moor our lonely ship  
And wander ever with woven hands,  
Murmuring softly lip to lip,  
Along the grass, along the sands,  
Murmuring how far away are the unquiet  
lands :

How we alone of mortals are  
Hid under quiet boughs apart,  
While our love grows an Indian star,  
A meteor of the burning heart,  
One with the tide that gleams, the wings that  
gleam and dart,

The heavy boughs, the burnished dove  
That moans and sighs a hundred days:  
How when we die our shades will rove,  
When eve has hushed the feathered ways,  
Dropping a vapoury footsole on the tide's  
drowsy blaze.

## THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES

Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,  
And over the mice in the barley sheaves;  
Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,  
And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,  
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;  
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget  
us,  
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

## EPHEMERA

“Your eyes that once were never weary of  
mine  
Are bowed in sorrow under their trembling  
lids,  
Because our love is waning.”

And then she :

“Although our love is waning, let us stand  
By the lone border of the lake once more,  
Together in that hour of gentleness  
When the poor tired child, Passion, falls  
asleep :

How far away the stars seem, and how far

Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!"  
Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,  
While slowly he whose hand held hers replied:  
"Passion has often worn our wandering  
hearts."

The woods were round them, and the yellow  
leaves

Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once  
A rabbit old and lame limped down the path;  
Autumn was over him: and now they stood  
On the lone border of the lake once more:  
Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead  
leaves

Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,  
In bosom and hair.

"Ah, do not mourn," he said,

“ That we are tired, for other loves await us:  
Hate on and love through unrepining hours;  
Before us lies eternity; our souls  
Are love, and a continual farewell.”

## THE MADNESS OF KING GOLL

I sat on cushioned otter skin :  
My word was law from Ith to Emen,  
And shook at Invar Amargin  
The hearts of the world-troubling seamen,  
And drove tumult and war away  
From girl and boy and man and beast ;  
The fields grew fatter day by day,  
The wild fowl of the air increased ;  
And every ancient Ollave said,  
While he bent down his fading head,  
“He drives away the Northern cold.”  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

I sat and mused and drank sweet wine;  
A herdsman came from inland valleys,  
Crying, the pirates drove his swine  
To fill their dark-beaked hollow galleys.  
  
I called my battle-breaking men,  
And my loud brazen battle-cars  
From rolling vale and rivery glen;  
And under the blinking of the stars  
Fell on the pirates by the deep,  
And hurled them in the gulph of sleep:  
These hands won many a torque of gold.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

But slowly, as I shouting slew  
And trampled in the bubbling mire,  
In my most secret spirit grew

A whirling and a wandering fire :  
I stood : keen stars above me shone,  
Around me shone keen eyes of men :  
I laughed aloud and hurried on  
By rocky shore and rushy fen ;  
I laughed because birds fluttered by,  
And starlight gleamed, and clouds flew high,  
And rushes waved and waters rolled.  
*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

And now I wander in the woods  
When summer gluts the golden bees,  
Or in autumnal solitudes  
Arise the leopard-coloured trees ;  
Or when along the wintry strands  
The cormorants shiver on their rocks ;

I wander on, and wave my hands,  
And sing, and shake my heavy locks.  
The gray wolf knows me; by one ear  
I lead along the woodland deer;  
The hares run by me growing bold.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

I came upon a little town,  
That slumbered in the harvest moon,  
And passed a-tip toe up and down,  
Murmuring, to a fitful tune,  
How I have followed, night and day  
A tramping of tremendous feet,  
And saw where this old tympan lay,  
Deserted on a doorway seat,  
And bore it to the woods with me;

Of some unhuman misery  
Our married voices wildly trolled.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

I sang how, when day's toil is done,  
Orchil shakes out her long dark hair  
That hides away the dying sun  
And sheds faint odours through the air :  
When my hand passed from wire to wire  
It quenched, with sound like falling dew,  
The whirling and the wandering fire ;  
But lift a mournful ulalu,  
For the kind wires are torn and still,  
And I must wander wood and hill  
Through summer's heat and winter's cold.

*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round  
me, the beech leaves old.*

## THE STOLEN CHILD

Where dips the rocky highland

Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,

There lies a leafy island

Where flapping herons wake

The drowsy water rats;

There we've hid our faery vats.

Full of berries,

And of reddest stolen cherries.

*Come away, O human child!*

*To the waters and the wild*

*With a faery, hand in hand,*

*For the world's more full of weeping than you*

*can understand.*

Where the wave of moonlight glosses

The dim gray sands with light,

Far off by furthest Rosses  
We foot it all the night,  
Weaving olden dances,  
Mingling hands and mingling glances  
Till the moon has taken flight ;  
To and fro we leap  
And chase the frothy bubbles,  
While the world is full of troubles  
And is anxious in its sleep.

*Come away, O human child!*  
*To the waters and the wild*  
*With a faery, hand in hand,*  
*For the world's more full of weeping than you*  
*can understand.*

Where the wandering water gushes  
From the hills above Glen-Car,

In pools among the rushes  
That scarce could bathe a star,  
We seek for slumbering trout,  
And whispering in their ears  
Give them unquiet dreams;  
Leaning softly out  
From ferns that drop their tears  
Over the young streams,  
*Come away, O human child!*  
*To the waters and the wild*  
*With a faery, hand in hand,*  
*For the world's more full of weeping than you*  
*can understand.*

Away with us he's going,  
The solemn-eyed :  
He'll hear no more the lowing

Of the calves on the warm hillside;  
Or the kettle on the hob  
Sing peace into his breast,  
Or see the brown mice bob  
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.

*For he comes, the human child,  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
From a world more full of weeping than he can  
understand.*

## TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER

Shy one, shy one,  
Shy one of my heart,  
She moves in the firelight  
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,  
And lays them in a row.  
To an isle in the water  
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,  
And lights the curtained room,  
Shy in the doorway  
And shy in the gloom ;

And shy as a rabbit,  
Helpful and shy.  
To an isle in the water  
With her would I fly.

## DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS

Down by the salley gardens my love and I  
did meet;

She passed the salley gardens with little snow-  
white feet.

She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow  
on the tree;

But I, being young and foolish, with her  
would not agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did  
stand,

And on my leaning shoulder she laid her  
snow-white hand.

She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows  
on the weirs;  
But I was young and foolish, and now am full  
of tears.

## THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

You waves, though you dance by my feet  
like children at play,  
Though you glow and you glance, though you  
purr and you dart;  
In the Junes that were warmer than these are,  
the waves were more gay,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my  
heart.*

The herring are not in the tides as they were  
of old ;  
My sorrow ! for many a creak gave the creel  
in the cart

That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my  
heart.*

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so  
fair when his oar  
Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud  
and apart,  
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the  
pebbly shore,  
*When I was a boy with never a crack in my  
heart.*

## THE BALLAD OF FATHER O'HART

Good Father John O'Hart

In penal days rode out  
To a shoneen who had free lands  
And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands;  
Sleiveens were all his race;  
And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,  
And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,  
And Father John went down;  
And he wore small holes in his shoes,  
And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,  
Whom the devils have by the hair,  
From the wives, and the cats, and the children,  
To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages  
As he went up and down;  
And he said with a smile, "Have peace now;"  
And he went his way with a frown.

But if when any one died  
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,  
He bade them give over their keening;  
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John,  
When weeping score by score,

People came into Coloony;  
For he'd died at ninety-four.

There was no human keening;  
The birds from Knocknarea  
And the world round Knocknashee  
Came keening in that day.

The young birds and old birds  
Came flying, heavy and sad;  
Keening in from Tiraragh,  
Keening from Ballinafad;

Keening from Inishmurray,  
Nor stayed for bite or sup;  
This way were all reproved  
Who dig old customs up.

## THE BALLAD OF MOLL MAGEE

Come round me, little childer;  
There, don't fling stones at me  
Because I mutter as I go;  
But pity Moll Magee.

My man was a poor fisher  
With shore lines in the say;  
My work was saltin' herrings  
The whole of the long day.

And sometimes from the saltin' shed,  
I scarce could drag my feet

Under the blessed moonlight,  
Along the pebbly street.

I'd always been but weakly,  
And my baby was just born;  
A neighbour minded her by day,  
I minded her till morn.

I lay upon my baby;  
Ye little childer dear,  
I looked on my cold baby  
When the morn grew frosty and clear.

A weary woman sleeps so hard !  
My man grew red and pale,  
And gave me money, and bade me go  
To my own place Kinsale.

He drove me out and shut the door,  
And gave his curse to me ;  
I went away in silence,  
No neighbour could I see.

The windows and the doors were shut,  
One star shone faint and green ;  
The little straws were turnin' round  
Across the bare boreen.

I went away in silence :  
Beyond old Martin's byre  
I saw a kindly neighbour  
Blowin' her mornin' fire

She drew from me my story —  
My money's all used up,

And still, with pityin', scornin' eye,  
She gives me bite and sup.

She says my man will surely come,  
And fetch me home agin';  
But always, as I'm movin' round,  
Without doors or within,

Pilin' the wood or pilin' the turf,  
Or goin' to the well,  
I'm thinkin' of my baby  
And keenin' to mysel'.

And sometimes I am sure she knows  
When, openin' wide His door,  
God lights the stars, His candles,  
And looks upon the poor.

So now, ye little childer,  
Ye won't fling stones at me;  
But gather with your shinin' looks  
And pity Moll Magee.

## THE BALLAD OF THE FOXHUNTER

“Now lay me in a cushioned chair  
And carry me, you four,  
With cushions here and cushions there,  
To see the world once more.  
  
And some one from the stables bring  
My Dermot dear and brown,  
And lead him gently in a ring,  
And gently up and down.

“Now leave the chair upon the grass:  
Bring hound and huntsman here,  
And I on this strange road will pass,  
Filled full of ancient cheer.”

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,  
His old eyes cloud with dreams;  
The sun upon all things that grow  
Pours round in sleepy streams.

Brown Dermot treads upon the lawn,  
And to the armchair goes,  
And now the old man's dreams are gone,  
He smooths the long brown nose.

And now moves many a pleasant tongue  
Upon his wasted hands,  
For leading aged hounds and young  
The huntsman near him stands.

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,  
And make the hills reply.”

The huntsman loosens on the morn  
A gay and wandering cry.

A fire is in the old man's eyes,  
His fingers move and sway,  
And when the wandering music dies  
They hear him feebly say,

“My huntsman, Rody, blow the horn,  
And make the hills reply,”  
“I cannot blow upon my horn,  
I can but weep and sigh.”

The servants round his cushioned place  
Are with new sorrow wrung;  
And hounds are gazing on his face,  
Both aged hounds and young.

One blind hound only lies apart  
On the sun-smitten grass;  
He holds deep commune with his heart:  
The moments pass and pass;

The blind hound with a mournful din  
Lifts slow his wintry head;  
The servants bear the body in;  
The hounds wail for the dead.

## EARLY POEMS

### II

*THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN*

*Give me the world if Thou wilt, but grant me an asylum  
for my affections.* — TULKA.

**To EDWIN J. ELLIS**



## **BOOK I**



S. PATRIC. You who are bent, and bald,  
and blind,

With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,  
Have known three centuries, poets sing,  
Of dalliance with a demon thing.

OISIN. Sad to remember, sick with years,  
The swift innumerable spears,  
The horsemen with their floating hair,  
And bowls of barley, honey, and wine,  
And feet of maidens dancing in tune,  
And the white body that lay by mine;  
But the tale, though words be lighter than  
air,  
Must live to be old like the wandering  
moon.

Caolte, and Conan, and Finn were there,  
When we followed a deer with our baying  
hounds,  
With Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,  
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill  
Where passionate Maeve is stony still;  
And found on the dove-gray edge of the sea  
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode  
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset on doomed ships;  
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,  
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,  
And with the glimmering crimson glowed  
Of many a figured embroidery;  
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell

That wavered like the summer streams,  
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

S. PATRIC. You are still wrecked among  
heathen dreams.

OISIN. "Why do you wind no horn?" she  
said.

"And every hero droop his head?  
The hornless deer is not more sad  
That many a peaceful moment had,  
More sleek than any granary mouse,  
In his own leafy forest house  
Among the waving fields of fern:  
The hunting of heroes should be glad."

"O pleasant maiden," answered Finn,  
"We think on Oscar's pencilled urn,  
And on the heroes lying slain,

On Gavra's raven-covered plain;  
But where are your noble kith and kin,  
And into what country do you ride?"

"My father and my mother are  
Aengus and Edain, and my name  
Is Niamh, and my land where tide  
And sleep drown sun and moon and star."

"What dream came with you that you came  
To this dim shore on foam wet feet?  
Did your companion wander away  
From where the birds of Aengus wing?"

She said, with laughter tender and sweet:  
"I have not yet, war-weary king,  
Been spoken of with any one,

For love of Oisin foam wet feet  
Have borne me where the tempests blind  
Your mortal shores till time is done!"

"How comes it, princess, that your mind  
Among undying people has run  
On this young man, Oisin, my son?"

"I loved no man, though kings besought  
And many a man of lofty name,  
Until the Danaan poets came,  
Bringing me honeyed, wandering thought  
Of noble Oisin and his fame,  
Of battles broken by his hands,  
Of stories builded by his words  
That are like coloured Asian birds  
At evening in their rainless lands."

O Patric, by your brazen bell,  
There was no limb of mine but fell  
Into a desperate gulph of love !  
“ You only will I wed,” I cried,  
“ And I will make a thousand songs,  
And set your name all names above,  
And captives bound with leather thongs  
Shall kneel and praise you, one by one,  
At evening in my western dun.”

“ O Oisin, mount by me and ride  
To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,  
Where men have heaped no burial mounds,  
And the days pass by like a wayward tune,  
Where broken faith has never been known,  
And the blushes of first love never have  
flown ;

And there I will give you a hundred hounds;  
No mightier creatures bay at the moon;  
And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,  
And a hundred calves and a hundred sheep  
Whose long wool whiter than sea froth flows,  
And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,  
And oil and wine and honey and milk,  
And always never-anxious sleep;  
While a hundred youths, mighty of limb,  
But knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife,  
And a hundred maidens, merry as birds,  
Who when they dance to a fitful measure  
Have a speed like the speed of the salmon  
herds  
Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,  
And you shall know the Danaan leisure:  
And Niamh be with you for a wife.”

Then she sighed gently, "It grows late,  
Music and love and sleep await,  
Where I would be when the white moon  
climbs,  
The red sun falls, and the world grows dim."

And then I mounted and she bound me  
With her triumphing arms around me,  
And whispering to herself enwound me;  
But when the horse had felt my weight,  
He shook himself and neighed three times:  
Caolte, Conan, and Finn came near,  
And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,  
And bid me stay, with many a tear;  
But we rode out from the human lands.

In what far kingdom do you go,  
Ah, Fenians, with the shield and bow?

Or are you phantoms white as snow,  
Whose lips had life's most prosperous glow ?  
O you, with whom in sloping valleys,  
Or down the dewy forest alleys,  
I chased at morn the flying deer,  
With whom I hurled the hurrying spear,  
And heard the foemen's bucklers rattle,  
And broke the heaving ranks of battle !  
And Bran, Sgeolan, and Lomair,  
Where are you with your long rough hair ?  
You go not where the red deer feeds,  
Nor tear the foeman from their steeds.

S. PATRIC. Boast not, nor mourn with  
drooping head

Companions long accurst and dead.  
And hounds for centuries dust and air.

OISIN. We galloped over the glossy sea :

I know not if days passed or hours,  
And Niamh sang continually  
Danaan songs, and their dewy showers  
Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,  
Lulled weariness, and softly round  
My human sorrow her white arms wound.

On ! on ! and now a hornless deer  
Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound  
All pearly white, save one red ear;  
And now a maiden rode like the wind  
With an apple of gold in her tossing hand,  
And with quenchless eyes and fluttering hair  
A beautiful young man followed behind.

“Were these two born in the Danaan land,  
Or have they breathed the mortal air?”

“Vex them no longer,” Niamh said,  
And sighing bowed her gentle head,  
And sighing laid the pearly tip  
Of one long finger on my lip.

But now the moon like a white rose shone  
In the pale west, and the sun’s rim sank,  
And clouds arrayed their rank on rank  
About his fading crimson ball :  
The floor of Emen’s hosting hall  
Was not more level than the sea,  
As full of loving phantasy,  
And with low murmurs we rode on,  
Where many a trumpet-twisted shell  
That in immortal silence sleeps  
Dreaming of her own melting hues,  
Her golds, her ambers, and her blues,

Pierced with soft light the shallowing deeps  
But now a wandering land breeze came  
And a far sound of feathery quires;  
It seemed to blow from the dying flame,  
They seemed to sing in the smouldering fires.  
The horse towards the music raced,  
Neighing along the lifeless waste;  
Like sooty fingers, many a tree  
Rose ever out of the warm sea;  
And they were trembling ceaselessly,  
As though they all were beating time,  
Upon the centre of the sun,  
To that low laughing woodland rhyme.  
And, now our wandering hours were done,  
We cantered to the shore, and knew  
The reason of the trembling trees:  
Round every branch the song-birds flew,

Or clung thereon like swarming bees;  
While round the shore a million stood  
Like drops of frozen rainbow light,  
And pondered in a soft vain mood,  
Upon their shadows in the tide,  
And told the purple deeps their pride,  
And murmured snatches of delight;  
And on the shores were many boats  
With bending sterns and bending bows,  
And carven figures on their prows  
Of bitterns, and fish-eating stoats,  
And swans with their exultant throats:  
And where the wood and waters meet  
We tied the horse in a leafy clump,  
And Niamh blew three merry notes  
Out of a little silver trump;  
And then an answering whisper flew

Over the bare and woody land,  
A whisper of impetuous feet,  
And ever nearer, nearer grew ;  
And from the woods rushed out a band  
Of men and maidens, hand in hand,  
And singing, singing altogether ;  
Their brows were white as fragrant milk,  
Their cloaks made out of yellow silk,  
And trimmed with many a crimson feather :  
And when they saw the cloak I wore  
Was dim with mire of a mortal shore,  
They fingered it and gazed on me  
And laughed like murmurs of the sea ;  
But Niamh with a swift distress  
Bid them away and hold their peace ;  
And when they heard her voice they ran  
And knelt them, every maid and man,

And kissed, as they would never cease,  
Her pearl-pale hand and the hem of her dress.  
She bade them bring us to the hall  
Where Aengus dreams, from sun to sun,  
A Druid dream of the end of days  
When the stars are to wane and the world be  
done.

They led us by long and shadowy ways  
Where drops of dew in myriads fall,  
And tangled creepers every hour  
Blossom in some new crimson flower,  
And once a sudden laughter sprang  
From all their lips, and once they sang  
Together, while the dark woods rang,  
And made in all their distant parts,  
With boom of bees in honey marts,

A rumour of delighted hearts.  
And once a maiden by my side  
Gave me a harp, and bid me sing,  
And touch the laughing silver string;  
But when I sang of human joy  
A sorrow wrapped each merry face,  
And, Patric ! by your beard, they wept,  
Until one came, a tearful boy ;  
“ A sadder creature never stept  
Than this strange human bard,” he cried ;  
And caught the silver harp away,  
And, weeping over the white strings, hurled  
It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place  
That kept dim waters from the sky ;  
And each one said with a long, long sigh,  
“ O saddest harp in all the world,  
Sleep there till the moon and the stars die ! ”

And now still sad we came to where  
A beautiful young man dreamed within  
A house of wattles, clay, and skin;  
One hand upheld his beardless chin,  
And one a sceptre flashing out  
Wild flames of red and gold and blue,  
Like to a merry wandering rout  
Of dancers leaping in the air;  
And men and maidens knelt them there  
And showed their eyes with teardrops dim,  
And with low murmurs prayed to him,  
And kissed the sceptre with red lips,  
And touched it with their finger-tips.

He held that flashing sceptre up.  
“Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,  
And fills with stars night’s purple cup,

And wakes the sluggish seeds of corn,  
And stirs the young kid's budding horn,  
And makes the infant ferns unwrap,  
And for the peewit paints his cap,  
And rolls along the unwieldy sun,  
And makes the little planets run :  
And if joy were not on the earth,  
There were an end of change and birth,  
And earth and heaven and hell would die,  
And in some gloomy barrow lie  
Folded like a frozen fly ;  
Then mock at Death and Time with glances  
And wavering arms and wandering dances.

“Men’s hearts of old were drops of flame  
That from the saffron morning came,  
Or drops of silver joy that fell

Out of the moon's pale twisted shell;  
But now hearts cry that hearts are slaves,  
And toss and turn in narrow caves;  
But here there is nor law nor rule,  
Nor have hands held a weary tool;  
And here there is nor Change nor Death,  
But only kind and merry breath,  
For joy is God and God is joy."  
With one long glance on maid and boy  
And the pale blossom of the moon,  
He fell into a Druid swoon.

And in a wild and sudden dance  
We mocked at Time and Fate and Chance,  
And swept out of the wattled hall  
And came to where the dewdrops fall  
Among the foamdrops of the sea,

And there we hushed the revelry;  
And, gathering on our brows a frown,  
Bent all our swaying bodies down,  
And to the waves that glimmer by  
That slooping green De Danaan sod  
Sang, "God is joy and joy is God,  
And things that have grown sad are wicked,  
And things that fear the dawn of the morrow,  
Or the gray wandering osprey Sorrow."

We danced to where in the winding thicket  
The damask roses, bloom on bloom,  
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom  
And bending over them softly said,  
Bending over them in the dance  
With a swift and friendly glance  
From dewy eyes: "Upon the dead

Fall the leaves of other roses,  
On the dead dim earth encloses:  
But never, never on our graves,  
Heaped beside the glimmering waves,  
Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.  
For neither Death nor Change comes near us,  
And all listless hours fear us,  
And we fear no dawning morrow,  
Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow."

The dance wound through the windless woods;  
The ever-summered solitudes;  
Until the tossing arms grew still  
Upon the woody central hill;  
And, gathered in a panting band,  
We flung on high each waving hand,  
And sang unto the starry broods:

In our raised eyes there flashed a glow  
Of milky brightness to and fro  
As thus our song arose: "You stars,  
Across your wandering ruby cars  
Shake the loose reins: you slaves of God  
He rules you with an iron rod,  
He holds you with an iron bond,  
Each one woven to the other,  
Each one woven to his brother  
Like bubbles in a frozen pond;  
But we in a lonely land abide  
Unchainable as the dim tide,  
With hearts that know nor law nor rule,  
And hands that hold no wearisome tool  
Folded in love that fears no morrow,  
Nor the gray wandering osprey Sorrow."  
O Patric! for a hundred years

I chased upon that woody shore  
The deer, the badger, and the boar.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
At evening on the glimmering sands,  
Beside the piled-up hunting spears,  
These now outworn and withered hands  
Wrestled among the island bands.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
We went a-fishing in long boats  
With bending sterns and bending bows,  
And carven figures on their prows  
Of bitterns and fish-eating stoats.  
O Patric ! for a hundred years  
The gentle Niamh was my wife ;  
But now two things devour my life ;  
The things that most of all I hate :  
Fasting and prayers.

S. PATRIC.

Tell on.

OISIN.

Yes, yes,

For these were ancient Oisin's fate  
Loosed long ago from heaven's gate,  
For his last days to lie in wait.

When one day by the shore I stood,  
I drew out of the numberless  
White flowers of the foam a staff of wood  
From some dead warrior's broken lance:  
I turned it in my hands; the stains  
Of war were on it, and I wept,  
Remembering how the Fenians stept  
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,  
Equal to good or grievous chance:  
Thereon young Niamh softly came  
And caught my hands, but spake no word

Save only many times my name,  
In murmurs, like a frightened bird.  
We passed by woods, and lawns of clover,  
And found the horse and bridled him,  
For we knew well the old was over.  
I heard one say "his eyes grow dim  
With all the ancient sorrow of men;"  
And wrapped in dreams rode out again  
With hoofs of the pale findrinny  
Over the glimmering purple sea:  
Under the golden evening light.  
The immortals moved among the fountains  
By rivers and the woods' old night;  
Some danced like shadows on the mountains  
Some wandered ever hand in hand,  
Or sat in dreams on the pale strand;  
Each forehead like an obscure star

Bent down above each hooked knee:  
And sang, and with a dreamy gaze  
Watched where the sun in a saffron blaze  
Was slumbering half in the sea ways;  
And, as they sang, the painted birds  
Kept time with their bright wings and feet;  
Like drops of honey came their words,  
But fainter than a young lamb's bleat.  
“An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,  
In the house of a child, of a friend, of a  
brother;  
He has over lingered his welcome; the days,  
Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each  
other;  
He hears the storm in the chimney above,  
And bends to the fire and shakes with the  
cold,

While his heart still dreams of battle and love,  
And the cry of the hounds on the hills of old.

“But we are apart in the grassy places,  
Where care cannot trouble the least of our  
days,  
Or the softness of youth be gone from our  
faces,

Or love’s first tenderness die in our gaze.  
The hare grows old as she plays in the sun  
And gazes around her with eyes of bright-  
ness;

Before the swift things that she dreamed of  
were done

She limps along in an aged whiteness;  
A storm of birds in the Asian trees  
Like tulips in the air a-winging,

And the gentle waves of the summer seas,  
That raise their heads and wander singing,  
Must murmur at last ‘unjust, unjust’  
And ‘my speed is a weariness,’ falters the  
mouse;  
And the kingfisher turns to a ball of dust,  
And the roof falls in of his tunnelled house.  
But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day  
When God shall come from the sea with a  
sigh  
And bid the stars drop down from the sky,  
And the moon like a pale rose wither away.”

## BOOK II



Now, man of croziers, shadows called our  
names

And then away, away, like whirling flames;  
And now fled by, mist-covered, without sound,  
The youth and lady and the deer and hound;  
“Gaze no more on the phantoms,” Niamh said,  
And kissed my eyes, and, swaying her bright  
head

And her bright body, sang of faery and man  
Before God was or my old line began;  
Wars shadowy, vast, exultant; faeries of old  
Who wedded men with rings of Druid gold;  
And how those lovers never turn their eyes  
Upon the life that fades and flickers and dies,

But love and kiss on dim shores far away  
Rolled round with music of the sighing spray:  
But sang no more, as when, like a brown bee  
That has drunk full, she crossed the misty sea  
With me in her white arms a hundred years  
Before this day; for now the fall of tears  
Troubled her song.

I do not know if days  
Or hours passed by, yet hold the morning rays  
Shone many times among the glimmering  
flowers  
Wove in her flower-like hair, before dark  
towers  
Rose in the darkness, and the white surf  
gleamed  
About them; and the horse of faery screamed

And shivered, knowing the Isle of many Fears,  
Nor ceased until white Niamh stroked his ears  
And named him by sweet names.

A foaming tide  
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and  
wide,  
Burst from a great door marred by many a  
blow  
From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago  
When gods and giants warred. We rode  
between  
The seaweed-covered pillars, and the green  
And surging phosphorus alone gave light  
On our dark pathway, till a countless flight  
Of moonlit steps glimmered; and left and  
right

Dark statues glimmered over the pale tide  
Upon dark thrones. Between the lids of one  
The imaged meteors had flashed and run  
And had disported in the stilly jet,  
And the fixed stars had dawned and shone and  
set,

Since God made Time and Death and Sleep:

the other

Stretched his long arm to where, a misty  
smother,

The stream churned, churned, and churned  
— his lips apart,

As though he told his never slumbering heart  
Of every foamdrop on its misty way:

Tying the horse to his vast foot that lay  
Half in the unvesselled sea, we climbed the  
stairs

And climbed so long, I thought the last steps  
were

Hung from the morning star; when these  
mild words

Fanned the delighted air like wings of birds:  
“My brothers spring out of their beds at morn,  
A-murmur like young partridge: with loud  
horn

They chase the noontide deer;  
And when the dew-drowned stars hang in the  
air

Look to long fishing-lines, or point and pare  
A larch-wood hunting spear.

“O sigh, O fluttering sigh, be kind to me;  
Flutter along the froth lips of the sea,  
And shores, the froth lips wet:

And stay a little while, and bid them weep:  
Ah, touch their blue veined eyelids if they  
sleep,

And shake their coverlet.

“ When you have told how I weep endlessly,  
Flutter along the froth lips of the sea  
And home to me again,  
And in the shadow of my hair lie hid,  
And tell me how you came to one unbid,  
The saddest of all men.”

A maiden with soft eyes like funeral tapers,  
And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit  
vapours,  
And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous  
As any ruddy moth, looked down on us;  
And she with a wave-rusted chain was tied

To two old eagles, full of ancient pride,  
That with dim eyeballs stood on either side.  
Few feathers were on their dishevelled wings,  
For their dim minds were with the ancient  
things.

“I bring deliverance,” pearl-pale Niamh said.

“Neither the living, nor the unlabouring dead,  
Nor the high gods who never lived, may fight  
My enemy and hope; demons for fright  
Jabber and scream about him in the night;  
For he is strong and crafty as the seas  
That sprang under the Seven Hazel Trees  
And I must needs endure and hate and weep,  
Until the gods and demons drop asleep  
Hearing Aed touch the mournful strings of  
gold.”

“Is he so dreadful?”

“Be not over bold,  
But flee while you may flee from him.”

Then I :  
“This demon shall be pierced and drop and  
die,  
And his loose bulk be thrown in the loud tide.”

“Flee from him,” pearl-pale Niamh weeping  
cried,  
“For all men flee the demons;” but moved  
not,  
Nor shook my firm and spacious soul one jot;  
There was no mightier soul of Heber’s line;  
Now it is old and mouse-like: for a sign

I burst the chain: still earless, nerveless,

blind,

Wrapped in the things of the unhuman mind,

In some dim memory or ancient mood

Still earless, nerveless, blind, the eagles stood.

And then we climbed the stair to a high door,

A hundred horsemen on the basalt floor

Beneath had paced content: we held our way

And stood within: clothed in a misty ray

I saw a foam-white seagull drift and float

Under the roof, and with a straining throat

Shouted, and hailed him: he hung there a star,

For no man's cry shall ever mount so far;

Not even your God could have thrown down

that hall;

Stabbing His unloosed lightnings in their stall,

He had sat down and sighed with cumbered  
heart,  
As though His hour were come.

We sought the part  
That was most distant from the door; green  
slime  
Made the way slippery, and time on time  
Showed prints of sea-born scales, while down  
through it  
The captives' journeys to and fro were writ  
Like a small river, and, where feet touched,  
came  
A momentary gleam of phosphorus flame.  
Under the deepest shadows of the hall  
That maiden found a ring hung on the wall,  
And in the ring a torch, and with its flare

Making a world about her in the air,  
Passed under a dim doorway, out of sight,  
And came again, holding a second light  
Burning between her fingers, and in mine  
Laid it and sighed: I held a sword whose  
    shine  
No centuries could dim: and a word ran  
Thereon in Ogham letters, “Mananan”:  
That sea-god’s name, who in a deep content  
Sprang dripping, and, with captive demons  
    sent  
Out of the seven-fold seas, built the dark hall  
Rooted in foam and clouds, and cried to all  
The mightier masters of a mightier race;  
And at his cry there came no milk-pale face  
Under a crown of thorns and dark with blood,  
But only exultant faces.

Niamh stood  
With bowed head, trembling when the white  
blade shone,  
But she whose hours of tenderness were gone  
Had neither hope nor fear. I bade them hide  
Under the shadows till the tumults died  
Of the loud crashing and earth shaking fight,  
Lest they should look upon some dreadful  
sight ;  
And thrust the torch between the slimy flags.  
A dome made out of endless carven jags,  
Where shadowy face flowed into shadowy face,  
Looked down on me ; and in the self-same  
place  
I waited hour by hour, and the high dome  
Windowless, pillarless, multitudinous home  
Of faces, waited ; and the leisured gaze

Was loaded with the memory of days  
Buried and mighty: when through the great  
door

The dawn came in, and glimmered on the  
floor

With a pale light, I journeyed round the  
hall

And found a door deep sunken in the wall,  
The least of doors; beyond on a dim plain  
A little runnel made a bubbling strain,  
And on the runnel's stony and bare edge  
A dusky demon dry as a withered sedge  
Swayed, crooning to himself an unknown  
tongue:

In a sad revelry he sang and swung  
Bacchant and mournful, passing to and fro  
His hand along the runnel's side, as though

The flowers still grew there: far on the sea's  
waste;

Shaking and waving, vapour vapour chased,  
While high frail cloudlets, fed with a green  
light,

Like drifts of leaves, immovable and bright,  
Hung in the passionate dawn. He slowly  
turned:

A demon's leisure: eyes, first white, now  
burned

Like wings of kingfishers; and he arose  
Barking. We trampled up and down with  
blows

Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day  
Gave to high noon and noon to night gave  
way;

But when at withering of the sun he knew

The Druid sword of Mananan, he grew  
To many shapes; I lunged at the smooth throat  
Of a great eel; it changed, and I but smote  
A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top;  
And I but held a corpse, with livid chop  
And dripping and sunken shape, to face and  
breast,

When I'd tore down that tree; but when the  
west

Surged up in plumpy fire, I lunged and drove  
Through heart and spine; and cast him in the  
wave,

Lest Niamh shudder.

Full of hope and dread  
Those two came carrying wine and meat and  
bread,

And healed my wounds with unguents out of  
flowers,

That feed white moths by some De Danaan  
shrine;

Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea shine,  
We lay on skins of otters, and drank wine,  
Brewed by the sea-gods, from huge cups that  
    lay

Upon the lips of sea-gods in their day;  
And then on heaped-up skins of otters slept.  
But when the sun once more in saffron stept,  
Rolling his flagrant wheel out of the deep,  
We sang the loves and angers without sleep,  
And all the exultant labours of the strong:

But now the lying clerics murder song  
With barren words and flatteries of the weak.

In what land do the powerless turn the beak  
Of ravening Sorrow, or the hand of Wrath?  
For all your croziers, they have left the path  
And wander in the storms and clinging snows,  
Hopeless for ever: ancient Oisin knows,  
For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies  
On the anvil of the world.

S. PATRIC.                          Be still: the skies  
Are choked with thunder, lightning, and fierce  
wind,  
For God has heard, and speaks His angry  
mind;  
Go cast your body on the stones and pray,  
For He has wrought midnight and dawn and  
day.  
OISIN. Saint, do you weep? I hear amid  
the thunder

The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder;  
Laughter and cries: the armies clash and  
shock;  
All is done now; I see the ravens flock;  
Ah, cease, you mournful, laughing Fenian  
horn!

We feasted for three days. On the fourth  
morn  
I found, dropping sea foam on the wide  
stair,  
And hung with slime, and whispering in his  
hair,  
That demon dull and unsubduable;  
And once more to a day-long battle fell,  
And at the sundown threw him in the surge,  
To lie until the fourth morn saw emerge

His new healed shape: and for a hundred  
years

So warred, so feasted, with nor dreams, nor  
fears

Nor languor nor fatigue: an endless feast,  
An endless war.

The hundred years had ceased;  
I stood upon the stair: the surges bore  
A beech bough to me, and my heart grew sore,  
Remembering how I stood by white-haired  
Finn

While the woodpecker made a merry din,  
The hare leaped in the grass.

Young Niamh came  
Holding that horse, and sadly called my  
name;

I mounted, and we passed over the lone  
And drifting grayness, while this monotone,  
Surly and distant, mixed inseparably  
Into the clangour of the wind and sea.

“I hear my soul drop down into decay,  
And Mananan’s dark tower, stone by stone,  
Gather sea slime and fall the seaward way,  
And the moon goad the waters night and day,  
That all be overthrown.

“But till the moon has taken all, I wage  
War on the mightiest men under the skies,  
And they have fallen or fled, age after age:  
Light is man’s love, and lighter is man’s  
rage;  
His purpose drifts and dies.”

And then lost Niamh murmured, "Love, we go  
To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo !  
The Islands of Dancing and of Victories  
Are empty of all power."

"And which of these  
Is the Island of Content?"

"None know," she said ;  
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.



## BOOK III



Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a  
wandering and milky smoke,  
High as the saddle girth, covering away from  
our glances the tide;  
And those that fled, and that followed, from  
the foam-pale distance broke;  
The immortal desire of immortals we saw in  
their faces, and sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and  
Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair,  
And never a song sang Niamh, and over my  
finger-tips  
Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping  
of mist-cold hair,

And now the warmth of sighs, and after the  
quiver of lips.

Were we days long or hours long in riding,  
when rolled in a grisly peace,  
An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel  
and oak?

And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not; for  
whiter than new-washed fleece  
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a  
wandering and milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge;  
the sea's edge barren and gray  
Gray sand on the green of the grasses and over  
the dripping trees,  
Dripping and doubling landward, as though  
they would hasten away

Like an army of old men longing for rest  
from the moan of the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense  
in their wrinkling bark;

Dropping; a murmurous dropping; old silence  
and that one sound;

For no live creatures lived there, no weasels  
moved in the dark:

Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us  
bubbled the ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away  
in the hollow night,

For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the  
gleams of the world and the sun,

Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel  
and oak leaf, the light,

And the stars were blotted above us, and the  
whole of the world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny; for, cumbrous  
with stems of the hazel and oak,

A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there  
in the long grass lay,

Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous  
slumbering folk,

Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out  
and heaped in the way.

And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow  
and shield and blade;

And dew-blanch'd horns, in whose hollow a  
child of three years old

Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all in-  
wrought and inlaid,

And more comely than man can make them  
with bronze and silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was  
huger than fourscore men;

The tops of their ears were feathered, their  
hands were the claws of birds,

And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and  
the leaves of the mural glen,

The breathing came from those bodies, long-  
warless, grown whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that  
He who had stars for His flocks

Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor  
go from His dew-cumbered skies;

So long were they sleeping, the owls had  
builded their nests in their locks,

Filling the fibrous dimness with long genera-tions of eyes.

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls wandered and came,

Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow place wide;

And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees in the soft star-flame,

Lay loose in a place of shadow: we drew the reins by his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely along the dim ground;

In one was a branch soft-shining, with bells more many than sighs,

In midst of an old man's bosom; owls ruffling and pacing around,

Sidled their bodies against him, filling the  
shade with their eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers;  
for nowhere in any clann  
Of the high people of Soraca nor in glamour  
by demons flung,  
Are faces alive with such beauty made known  
to the salt eye of man,  
Yet weary with passions that faded when the  
seven-fold seas were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's for-  
bear, far sung by the Sennachies.  
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary,  
there camping in grasses deep,  
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the  
shores of the wandering seas,

Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it,  
and fed of unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niamh, I blew a  
lingering note;  
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a  
sound like the stirring of flies.

He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving  
the pillar of his throat,  
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the  
wells of his eyes.

I cried, "Come out of the shadow, King of the  
nails of gold !

And tell of your goodly household and the  
goodly works of your hands,  
That we may muse in the starlight and talk  
of the battles of old ;

Your questioner, Oisin, is worthy, he comes  
from the Fenian lands."

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull  
with the smoke of their dreams;

His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer  
out of them came;

Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch,  
slow dropping a sound in faint streams  
Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing  
the marrow like flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness more than of earth,

The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone  
like a sea-covered stone

Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow

and the memories of the whole of my  
mirth,

And a softness came from the starlight and  
filled me full to the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid  
my body as low;

And the pearl-pale Niamh lay by me, her  
brow on the midst of my breast;

And the horse was gone in the distance, and  
years after years 'gan flow;

Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, bind-  
ing us down to our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a cen-  
tury there I forgot;

How the fetlocks drip blood in the battle,  
when the fallen on fallen lie rolled;

How the falconer follows the falcon in the  
weeds of the heron's plot,

And the names of the demons whose hammers  
made armour for Midhir of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a  
century there I forgot;

That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood,  
the shield out of ozier and hide;

How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the  
spear-head's burning spot;

How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low  
sadly at evening tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driv-  
ing the dust with their throngs,

Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all  
who are winter tales:

Came by me the Kings of the Red Branch, with  
roaring of laughter and songs,  
Or moved as they moved once, love-making  
or piercing the tempest with sails.

Came Blanid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who  
feastward of old time slunk,  
Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the  
spittle on his beard never dry,  
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car borne, his  
mighty head sunk  
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and  
death-making eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians  
moved in loud streams,  
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with  
her needle of bone.

So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and  
wrought not, with creatures of dreams,  
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes  
dumb as a stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When  
the sun was on silver or gold;  
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in  
the dimness they love going by;  
When a glow-worm was green on a grass leaf  
lured from his lair in the mould;  
Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed  
on the grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at  
the heel of a century fell,  
Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his  
miles in the midst of the air,

A starling like them that forgathered 'neath  
    a moon waking white as a shell,  
When the Fenians made foray at morning  
    with Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair.

I awoke : the strange horse without summons  
    out of the distance ran,  
Thrusting his nose to my shoulder ; he knew  
    in his bosom deep  
That once more moved in my bosom the  
    ancient sadness of man,  
And that I would leave the immortals, their  
    dimness, their dews dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niamh grow white  
    as the waters are white,  
Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your  
    hands and wept :

But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering alone that delight  
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs impatiently stept.

I cried, "O Niamh ! O white one ! if only a twelve-houred day,  
I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where the old men and young  
In the Fenians' dwellings of wattle lean on the chessboards and play,  
Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan's slanderous tongue !

"Like me were some galley forsaken far off in Meridian isle.

Remembering its long-oared companions, sails turning to threadbare rags ;

No more to crawl on the seas with long oars  
    mile after mile,  
But to be amid shooting of flies and flower-  
    ing of rushes and flags."

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild  
    with mysterious thought,  
Watched her those seamless faces from the  
    valley's glimmering girth ;  
As she murmured, "O wandering Oisin, the  
    strength of the bell-branch is naught,  
For there moves alive in your fingers the  
    fluttering sadness of earth.

"Then go through the lands in the saddle and  
    see what the mortals do,  
And softly come to your Niamh over the  
    tops of the tide ;

But weep for your Niamh, O Oisin, weep; for  
if only your shoe

Brush lightly as haymouse earth's pebbles,  
you will come no more to my side.

“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you  
turn to your rest?”

I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth  
she made her moan;

“I would die like a small withered leaf in the  
autumn, for breast unto breast

We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty  
their sweetness lone

“In the isles of the farthest seas where only  
the spirits come

Were the winds less soft than the breath of  
a pigeon who sleeps on her nest,

Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound

of the sea's vague drum

O flaming lion of the world, O when will you

turn to your rest?"

The wailing grew distant; I rode by the woods

of the wrinkling bark

Where ever is murmurous dropping, old

silence and that one sound;

For no live creatures live there, no weasels

move in the dark;

In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the

bubbling ground.

And I rode by the plains of the sea's edge,

where all is barren and gray,

Gray sands on the green of the grasses and

over the dripping trees,

Dripping and doubling landward, as though  
they would hasten away,  
Like an army of old men longing for rest from  
the moan of the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea's  
edge turning and turning go,

As my mind made the names of the Fenians.

Far from the hazel and oak  
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the  
saddle bow,  
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a  
wandering and milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the  
winds fled out of the vast,  
Snatching the bird in secret; nor knew I,  
embosomed apart,

When they froze the cloth on my body like  
armour riveted fast,  
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened  
in the gates of my heart.

Till fattening the winds of the morning, an  
odour of new-mown hay  
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears  
like berries fell down;  
Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of  
a shore far away,  
From the great grass-barnacle calling, and  
later the shore-weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crush-  
ing the sand and the shells  
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a  
chaunt of love on my lips,

Not coughing, my head on my knees, and  
praying, and wroth with the bells,  
I would leave no saint's head on his body from  
Rachlin to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode  
on a bridle-path

Much wondering to see upon all hands, of  
wattles and woodwork made,

Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless  
the sacred cairn and the rath,

And a small and feeble race stooping with  
mattock and spade.

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining  
with much-toil wet;

While in this place and that place, with bodies  
unglorious, their chieftains stood,

Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered  
one, caught in your net :

Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth  
like the roaring of wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so  
speedy with eyes so bright,

Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old  
man lifted his head :

And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, "The  
Fenians hunt wolves in the night,

So sleep they by daytime." A voice cried,  
"The Fenians a long time are dead."

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway,  
the flesh of his face as dried grass,

And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he  
sad as a child without milk ;

And the dreams of the islands were gone, and  
I knew how men sorrow and pass,  
And their hound, and their horse, and their  
love, and their eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I mur-  
mured, “In old age they ceased;”

And my tears were larger than berries, and I  
murmured, “Where white clouds lie spread  
On Crevroe or broad Knockfefin, with many  
of old they feast

On the floors of the gods.” He cried, “No,  
the gods a long time are dead.”

And lonely and longing for Niamh, I shivered  
and turned me about,

The heart in me longing to leap like a grass-  
hopper into her heart;

I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the sea's old shout  
Till I saw where Maeve lies sleeping till star-light and midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a sack full of sand,  
They bore it with staggering and sweating,  
but fell with their burden at length :  
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle,  
I flung it five yards with my hand,  
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob  
for the Fenians' old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O croziered one ;  
how, when divided the girth,  
I fell on the path, and the horse went away  
like a summer fly ;

And my years three hundred fell on me, and  
I rose, and walked on the earth,  
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the  
spittle on his beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a  
church with its belfry in air;  
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in  
my dim eyes the crozier gleams;  
What place have Caolte and Conan, and Bran,  
Sgeolan, Lomair?  
Speak, you too are old with your memories,  
an old man surrounded with dreams.

S. PATRIC. Where the flesh of the footsole  
clingeth on the burning stones is their  
place;

Where the demons whip them with wires on  
the burning stones of wide hell,  
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and  
the smile on God's face,  
Between them a gateway of brass, and the  
howl of the angels who fell.

OISIN. Put the staff in my hands; for I go  
to the Fenians, O cleric, to chaunt  
The war-songs that roused them of old; they  
will rise, making clouds with their breath  
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay  
underneath them shall pant,  
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled  
beneath them in death.  
  
And demons afraid in their darkness; deep  
horror of eyes and of wings,

Afraid their ears on the earth laid, shall  
listen and rise up and weep;  
Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver  
of stretched bowstrings,  
Hearing hell loud with a murmur, as shouting  
and mocking we sweep.

We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter  
the gateway of brass  
And enter, and none sayeth "No" when there  
enters the strongly armed guest;  
Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on  
as oxen move over young grass;  
Then feast, making converse of Eire, of wars,  
and of old wounds, and rest.

S. PATRIC. On the flaming stones, without  
refuge, the limbs of the Fenians are tost;

None war on the masters of Hell, who could  
break up the world in their rage;  
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for  
your soul that is lost  
Through the demon love of its youth and its  
godless and passionate age.

OISIN. Ah, me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with old age and pain,  
Without laughter, a show unto children, alone  
with remembrance and fear,  
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's  
cloak in the rain,  
As a grass seed crushed by a pebble, as a wolf  
sucked under a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man  
I loved of old there;

I throw down the chain of small stones ! when  
life in my body has ceased,  
I will go to Caolte, and Conan, and Bran,  
Sgeolan, Lomair,  
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be  
they in flames or at feast.



## EARLY POEMS

III

*THE ROSE*

*Sero te amavi, Pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova!*  
Sero te amavi.—S. AUGUSTINE.

**To LIONEL JOHNSON**



TO THE ROSE UPON THE ROOD OF  
TIME

*Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days !  
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways :  
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide ;  
The Druid, gray, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,  
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin un-  
told ;  
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old  
In dancing silver sandalled on the sea,  
Sing in their high and lonely melody.  
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,  
I find under the boughs of love and hate,  
In all poor foolish things that live a day,  
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.*

*Come near, come near, come near — Ah, leave  
me still*

*A little space for the rose-breath to fill!*

*Lest I no more hear common things that crave;  
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,*

*The field mouse running by me in the grass,*

*And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;*

*But seek alone to hear the strange things said*

*By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,*

*And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.*

*Come near; I would, before my time to go,*

*Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:*

*Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.*

## FERGUS AND THE DRUID

FERGUS. The whole day have I followed  
in the rocks,  
And you have changed and flowed from shape  
to shape.

First as a raven on whose ancient wings  
Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed  
A weasel moving on from stone to stone,  
And now at last you wear a human shape,  
A thin gray man half lost in gathering night.

DRUID. What would you, king of the proud  
Red Branch kings?

FERGUS. This would I say, most wise of  
living souls:

Young subtle Conchubar sat close by me  
When I gave judgment, and his words were  
wise,  
And what to me was burden without end,  
To him seemed easy, so I laid the crown  
Upon his head to cast away my care.

DRUID. What would you, king of the proud  
Red Branch kings?

FERGUS. I feast amid my people on the  
hill,  
And pace the woods, and drive my chariot  
wheels  
In the white border of the murmuring  
sea;  
And still I feel the crown upon my head.

DRUID. What would you, king of the proud  
Red Branch kings?

FERGUS. I'd put away the foolish might  
of a king,

But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

DRUID. Look on my thin gray hair and hol-  
low cheeks,

And on these hands that may not lift the  
sword

This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.

No maiden loves me, no man seeks my help,  
Because I be not of the things I dream.

FERGUS. A wild and foolish labourer is a  
king,

To do and do and do, and never dream.

DRUID. Take, if you must, this little bag of  
dreams;

Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you  
round.

FERGUS. I see my life go dripping like a  
stream

From change to change; I have been many  
things,

A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light  
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,  
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,  
A king sitting upon a chair of gold,  
And all these things were wonderful and great;  
But now I have grown nothing, being all,  
And the whole world weighs down upon my  
heart:

Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow  
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured thing!

## THE DEATH OF CUCHULAIN

A man came slowly from the setting sun,  
To Forgail's daughter, Emer, in her dun,  
And found her dyeing cloth with subtle care,  
And said, casting aside his draggled hair:  
“I am Aleel, the swineherd, whom you bid  
Go dwell upon the sea cliffs, vapour hid;  
But now my years of watching are no more.”

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,  
And stretching out her arms, red with the dye,  
Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

Looking on her, Aleel, the swineherd, said:  
“Not any god alive, nor mortal dead,

Has slain so mighty armies, so great kings,  
Nor won the gold that now Cuchulain brings."

"Why do you tremble thus from feet to  
crown?"

Aleel, the swineherd, wept and cast him down  
Upon the web-heaped floor, and thus his word :  
"With him is one sweet throated like a bird,  
And lovelier than the moon upon the sea;  
He made for her an army cease to be."

"Who bade you tell these things?" and then  
she cried  
To those about, "Beat him with thongs of  
hide  
And drive him from the door." And thus it  
was;

And where her son, Finmole, on the smooth  
grass

Was driving cattle, came she with swift feet,  
And called out to him, "Son, it is not meet  
That you stay idling here with flocks and  
herds."

"I have long waited, mother, for those words;  
But wherefore now?"

"There is a man to die;  
You have the heaviest arm under the sky."

"My father dwells among the sea-worn bands,  
And breaks the ridge of battle with his hands."

"Nay, you are taller than Cuchulain, son."

“He is the mightiest man in ship or dun.”

“Nay, he is old and sad with many wars,  
And weary of the crash of battle cars.”

“I only ask what way my journey lies,  
For God, who made you bitter, made you  
wise.”

“The Red Branch kings a tireless banquet  
keep,  
Where the sun falls into the Western deep.  
Go there, and dwell on the green forest rim  
But tell alone your name and house to him  
Whose blade compels, and bid them send you  
one  
Who has a like vow from their triple dun.”

Between the lavish shelter of a wood  
And the gray tide, the Red Branch multitude  
Feasted, and with them old Cuchulain dwelt,  
And his young dear one close beside him  
knelt,  
And gazed upon the wisdom of his eyes,  
More mournful than the depth of starry skies,  
And pondered on the wonder of his days;  
And all around the harp-string told his praise,  
And Conchubar, the Red Branch king of kings,  
With his own fingers touched the brazen  
strings.

At last Cuchulain spake, “A young man strays  
Driving the deer along the woody ways.  
I often hear him singing to and fro  
I often hear the sweet sound of his bow,  
Seek out what man he is.”

One went and came.

“ He bade me let all know he gives his name  
At the sword point, and bade me bring him  
one

Who had a like vow from our triple dun.”

“I only of the Red Branch hosted now,”  
Cuchulain cried, “have made and keep that  
vow.”

After short fighting in the leafy shade,  
He spake to the young man, “Is there no maid  
Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you  
round,

Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,  
That you come here to meet this ancient  
sword ?”

“The dooms of men are in God’s hidden  
hoard.”

“Your head a while seemed like a woman’s  
head  
That I loved once.”

Again the fighting sped,  
But now the war rage in Cuchulain woke,  
And through the other’s shield his long blade  
broke,  
And pierced him.

“Speak before your breath is done.”

“I am Finmole, mighty Cuchulain’s son.”

“I put you from your pain. I can no more.”

While day its burden on to evening bore,  
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain  
stayed ;  
Then Conchubar sent that sweet-throated  
maid,  
And she, to win him, his gray hair caressed ;  
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.  
Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,  
Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,  
Spake thus, "Cuchulain will dwell there and  
brood,  
For three days more in dreadful quietude,  
And then arise, and raving slay us all.  
Go, cast on him delusions magical,  
That he might fight the waves of the loud  
sea."  
And ten by ten under a quicken tree,

The Druids chaunted, swaying in their hands  
Tall wands of alder and white quicken wands.

In three days' time, Cuchulain with a moan  
Stood up, and came to the long sands alone :  
For four days warred he with the bitter tide ;  
And the waves flowed above him, and he died.

## THE ROSE OF THE WORLD

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a  
dream?

For these red lips, with all their mournful  
pride,

Mournful that no new wonder may betide,  
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:  
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place,  
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,  
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode :  
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,  
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat ;  
He made the world to be a grassy road  
Before her wandering feet.

## THE ROSE OF PEACE

If Michael, leader of God's host  
When Heaven and Hell are met,  
Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post  
He would his deeds forget.

Brooding no more upon God's wars  
In his Divine homestead,  
He would go weave out of the stars  
A chaplet for your head.

And all folk seeing him bow down,  
And white stars tell your praise,  
Would come at last to God's great town,  
Led on by gentle ways;

And God would bid His warfare cease.  
Saying all things were well;  
And softly make a rosy peace,  
A peace of Heaven with Hell.

## THE ROSE OF BATTLE

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World !

The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled

Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,  
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care ;  
While hushed from fear, or loud with hope, a  
band

With blown, spray-dabbled hair gather at  
hand.

*Turn if you may from battles never done,*  
I call, as they go by me one by one,  
*Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,*  
*For him who hears love sing and never cease,*  
*Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade :*

*But gather all for whom no love hath made  
A woven silence, or but came to cast  
A song into the air, and singing past  
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you  
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew  
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,  
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,  
Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips;  
And wage God's battles in the long gray ships.  
The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,  
To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;  
God's bell has claimed them by the little cry  
Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.*

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!  
You, too, have come where the dim tides are  
hurled

Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring  
The bell that calls us on ; the sweet far thing.  
Beauty grown sad with its eternity  
Made you of us, and of the dim gray sea.  
Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and  
wait,  
For God has bid them share an equal fate ;  
And when at last defeated in His wars,  
They have gone down under the same white  
stars,  
We shall no longer hear the little cry  
Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

## A FAERY SONG

*Sung by the people of faery over Diarmuid and  
Grania, who lay in their bridal sleep under  
a Cromlech.*

We who are old, old and gay,

O so old !

Thousands of years, thousands of years

If all were told :

Give to these children, new from the world,

Silence and love ;

And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,

And the stars above :

Give to these children, new from the world,  
Rest far from men.

Is anything better, anything better?  
Tell us it then:

Us who are old, old and gay:

O so old!

Thousands of years, thousands of years,  
If all were told.

## THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and  
wattles made;  
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the  
honey bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace  
comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to  
where the cricket sings;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a  
purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and  
day

I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by  
the shore;

While I stand on the roadway, or on the pave-  
ments gray,

I hear it in the deep heart's core.

## A CRADLE SONG

The angels are stooping  
Above your bed ;  
They weary of trooping  
With the whimpering dead.

God's laughing in heaven  
To see you so good ;  
The Shining Seven  
Are gay with His mood.

I kiss you and kiss you,  
My pigeon, my own ;  
Ah, how I shall miss you  
When you have grown.

## THE PITY OF LOVE

A pity beyond all telling  
Is hid in the heart of love :  
The folk who are buying and selling ;  
The clouds on their journey above ;  
The cold wet winds ever blowing ;  
And the shadowy hazel grove  
Where mouse-gray waters are flowing  
Threaten the head that I love.

## THE SORROW OF LOVE

The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,  
The full round moon and the star-laden  
sky,  
And the loud song of the ever-singing  
leaves,  
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

And then you came with those red mournful  
lips,  
And with you came the whole of the world's  
tears,  
And all the trouble of her labouring ships,  
And all the trouble of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,  
The curd-pale moon, the white stars in the sky,  
And the loud chaunting of the unquiet leaves,  
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry.

## WHEN YOU ARE OLD

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep ;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true ;  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars  
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

## THE WHITE BIRDS

I would that we were, my beloved, white birds  
on the foam of the sea !  
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it  
can fade and flee ;  
And the flame of the blue star of twilight,  
hung low on the rim of the sky,  
Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness  
that may not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew  
dabbled, the lily and rose ;  
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame  
of the meteor that goes,

Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung  
low in the fall of the dew :  
For I would we were changed to white birds  
on the wandering foam : I and you !

I am haunted by numberless islands, and  
many a Danaan shore,  
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sor-  
row come near us no more ;  
Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret  
of the flames would we be,  
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed  
out on the foam of the sea !

## A DREAM OF DEATH

I dreamed that one had died in a strange place  
Near no accustomed hand ;  
And they had nailed the boards above her  
face  
The peasants of that land,  
And, wondering, planted by her solitude  
A cypress and a yew :  
I came, and wrote upon a cross of wood,  
Man had no more to do :  
*She was more beautiful than thy first love,*  
*This lady by the trees :*  
And gazed upon the mournful stars above,  
And heard the mournful breeze.

## A DREAM OF A BLESSED SPIRIT

All the heavy days are over;  
Leave the body's coloured pride  
Underneath the grass and clover,  
With the feet laid side by side.

One with her are mirth and duty;  
Bear the gold embroidered dress,  
For she needs not her sad beauty,  
To the scented oaken press.

Hers the kiss of Mother Mary,  
The long hair is on her face;  
Still she goes with footsteps wary,  
Full of earth's old timid grace.

With white feet of angels seven  
Her white feet go glimmering;  
And above the deep of heaven,  
Flame on flame and wing on wing.

## THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;  
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,  
And he had known at last some tenderness,  
Before earth made of him her sleepy care;  
But when a man poured fish into a pile,  
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,  
And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds  
Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,  
Where people love beside star-laden seas;  
How Time may never mar their faery vows  
Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs:  
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;  
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,  
And he had known at last some prudent years  
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;  
But while he passed before a plashy place,  
A lug-worm with its gray and muddy mouth  
Sang how somewhere to north or west or  
south

There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;  
And how beneath those three times blessed  
skies

A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons,  
And as it falls awakens leafy tunes:  
And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,  
He mused upon his mockers: without fail

His sudden vengeance were a country tale,  
Now that deep earth has drunk his body in;  
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool  
Told where, ah, little, all-unneeded voice !  
Old Silence bids a lonely folk rejoice,  
And chaplet their calm brows with leafage  
    cool ;  
And how, when fades the sea-strewn rose of  
    day,  
A gentle feeling wraps them like a fleece,  
And all their trouble dies into its peace :  
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall ;  
And might have known at last unhaunted  
    sleep

Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,

Now that old earth had taken man and all:  
Were not the worms that spired about his  
bones

A-telling with their low and reedy cry,  
Of how God leans His hands out of the sky,  
To bless that isle with honey in His tones;  
That none may feel the power of squall and  
wave,  
And no one any leaf-crowned dancer miss  
Until He burn up Nature with a kiss:  
The man has found no comfort in the grave.

THE DEDICATION TO A BOOK OF  
STORIES SELECTED FROM THE  
IRISH NOVELISTS

There was a green branch hung with many a  
bell

When her own people ruled in wave-worn  
Eire;

And from its murmuring greenness, calm of  
faery,

A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,  
And turned the farmer's memory from his  
cattle,

And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of  
battle,  
For all who heard it dreamed a little while.

Ah, Exiles wandering over many seas,  
Spinning at all times Eire's good to-morrow !  
Ah, worldwide Nation, always growing Sor-  
row !

I also bear a bell branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tossed and  
hurled,  
Green boughs of tossing always, weary,  
weary !

I tore it from the green boughs of old  
Eire,  
The willow of the many-sorrowed world.

Ah, Exiles, wandering over many lands!  
My bell branch murmurs: the gay bells bring  
laughter,  
Leaping to shake a cobweb from the rafter;  
The sad bells bow the forehead on the hands.

A honeyed ringing: under the new skies  
They bring you memories of old village faces;  
Cabins gone now, old well-sides, old dear  
places;  
And men who loved the cause that never dies.

## THE LAMENTATION OF THE OLD PENSIONER

I had a chair at every hearth,  
When no one turned to see,  
With "Look at that old fellow there,  
And who may he be?"  
And therefore do I wander now,  
And the fret lies on me.

The road-side trees keep murmuring  
Ah, wherefore murmur ye,  
As in the old days long gone by,  
Green oak and poplar tree?  
The well-known faces are all gone  
And the fret lies on me.

## THE BALLAD OF FATHER GILLIGAN

The old priest Peter Gilligan  
Was weary night and day;  
For half his flock were in their beds,  
Or under green sods lay.

Once, while he nodded on a chair,  
At the moth-hour of eve,  
Another poor man sent for him,  
And he began to grieve.

“I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,  
For people die and die”;  
And after cried he, “God forgive !  
My body spake, not I !”

He knelt, and leaning on the chair  
He prayed and fell asleep;  
And the moth-hour went from the fields,  
And stars began to peep.

They slowly into millions grew,  
And leaves shook in the wind;  
And God covered the world with shade,  
And whispered to mankind.

Upon the time of sparrow chirp  
When the moths came once more,  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
Stood upright on the floor.

“Mavrone, mavrone! the man has died,  
While I slept on the chair”;

He roused his horse out of its sleep,  
And rode with little care.

He rode now as he never rode,  
By rocky lane and fen;  
The sick man's wife opened the door:  
'Father! you come again!'

"And is the poor man dead?" he cried.  
"He died an hour ago,"  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
In grief swayed to and fro.

"When you were gone, he turned and died  
As merry as a bird."  
The old priest Peter Gilligan  
He knelt him at that word.

“He who hath made the night of stars  
For souls, who tire and bleed,  
Sent one of His great angels down  
To help me in my need.

“He who is wrapped in purple robes,  
With planets in His care,  
Had pity on the least of things  
Asleep upon a chair.”

## THE TWO TREES

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,  
The holy tree is growing there;  
From joy the holy branches start,  
And all the trembling flowers they bear.  
The changing colours of its fruit  
Have dowered the stars with merry light;  
The surety of its hidden root  
Has planted quiet in the night;  
The shaking of its leafy head  
Has given the waves their melody,  
And made my lips and music wed,  
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.  
There, through bewildered branches, go

Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,  
Tossing and tossing to and fro  
The flaming circle of our life.  
  
When looking on their shaken hair,  
And dreaming how they dance and dart,  
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:  
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
The demons, with their subtle guile,  
Lift up before us when they pass,  
Or only gaze a little while;  
  
For there a fatal image grows,  
With broken boughs, and blackened leaves,  
And roots half hidden under snows  
Driven by a storm that ever grieves.  
  
For all things turn to barrenness

In the dim glass the demons hold,  
The glass of outer weariness,  
Made when God slept in times of old.  
  
There, through the broken branches, go  
The ravens of unresting thought;  
Peering and flying to and fro,  
To see men's souls bartered and bought.  
  
When they are heard upon the wind,  
And when they shake their wings; alas!  
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:  
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

## TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES

*Know, that I would accounted be  
True brother of that company,  
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song;  
Nor be I any less of them,  
Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
Of her, whose history began  
Before God made the angelic clan,  
Trails all about the written page;  
For in the world's first blossoming age  
The light fall of her flying feet  
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;*

*And still the starry candles flare  
To help her light foot here and there;  
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood  
Upon her holy quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one  
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
Because to him, who ponders well,  
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,  
That God gives unto man in sleep.  
For the elemental beings go  
About my table to and fro.  
In flood and fire and clay and wind,  
They huddle from man's pondering mind;  
Yet he who treads in austere ways  
May surely meet their ancient gaze.*

*Man ever journeys on with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.  
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,  
A Druid land, a Druid tune!*

*While still I may, I write for you  
The love I lived, the dream I knew.  
From our birthday, until we die,  
Is but the winking of an eye;  
And we, our singing and our love,  
The mariners of night above,  
And all the wizard things that go  
About my table to and fro,  
Are passing on to where may be,  
In truth's consuming ecstasy,  
No place for love and dream at all;  
For God goes by with white foot-fall.*

*I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you, in the dim coming times,  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*



# **THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS**



## THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE

The host is riding from Knocknarea  
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;  
Caolte tossing his burning hair  
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*  
*Empty your heart of its mortal dream.*  
*The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,*  
*Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,*  
*Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,*  
*Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;*  
*And if any gaze on our rushing band,*  
*We come between him and the deed of his hand,*  
*We come between him and the hope of his*  
*heart.*

The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,  
And where is there hope or deed as fair ?  
Caolte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling *Away, come away.*

## THE EVERLASTING VOICES

O sweet everlasting voices be still ;  
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold  
And bid them wander obeying your will  
Flame under flame, till Time be no more ;  
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,  
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,  
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore ?  
O sweet everlasting Voices be still.

## THE MOODS

Time drops in decay,  
Like a candle burnt out,  
And the mountains and woods  
Have their day, have their day;  
What one in the rout  
Of the fire-born moods,  
Has fallen away ?

## THE LOVER TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS HEART

All things uncomely and broken, all things  
worn out and old,  
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak  
of a lumbering cart,  
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing  
the wintry mould,  
Are wronging your image that blossoms a  
rose in the deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too  
great to be told;  
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a  
green knoll apart,

With the earth and the sky and the water,  
remade, like a casket of gold  
For my dreams of your image that blossoms  
a rose in the deeps of my heart.

## THE HOST OF THE AIR

O'Driscoll drove with a song,  
The wild duck and the drake,  
From the tall and the tufted reeds  
Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark  
At the coming of night tide,  
And dreamed of the long dim hair  
Of Bridget his bride.

He heard while he sang and dreamed  
A piper piping away,

And never was piping so sad,  
And never was piping so gay.

And he saw young men and young girls  
Who danced on a level place  
And Bridget his bride among them,  
With a sad and a gay face.

The dancers crowded about him,  
And many a sweet thing said,  
And a young man brought him red wine  
And a young girl white bread.

But Bridget drew him by the sleeve,  
Away from the merry bands,  
To old men playing at cards  
With a twinkling of ancient hands.

The bread and the wine had a doom,  
For these were the host of the air ;  
He sat and played in a dream  
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men  
And thought not of evil chance,  
Until one bore Bridget his bride  
Away from the merry dance.

He bore her away in his arms,  
The handsomest young man there,  
And his neck and his breast and his arms  
Were drowned in her long dim hair.

O'Driscoll scattered the cards  
And out of his dream awoke :

Old men and young men and young girls  
Were gone like a drifting smoke;

But he heard high up in the air  
A piper piping away,  
And never was piping so sad,  
And never was piping so gay.

### THE FISHERMAN

Although you hide in the ebb and flow  
Of the pale tide when the moon has set,  
The people of coming days will know  
About the casting out of my net,  
And how you have leaped times out of mind  
Over the little silver cords,  
And think that you were hard and unkind,  
And blame you with many bitter words.

### A CRADLE SONG

The Danaan children laugh, in cradles of  
wrought gold,  
And clap their hands together, and half close  
their eyes,  
For they will ride the North when the ger-  
eagle flies,  
With heavy whitening wings, and a heart  
fallen cold :  
I kiss my wailing child and press it to my  
breast,  
And hear the narrow graves calling my child  
and me.

Desolate winds that cry over the wandering  
sea;

Desolate winds that hover in the flaming  
West;

Desolate winds that beat the doors of  
Heaven, and beat  
The doors of Hell and blow there many a  
whimpering ghost;

O heart the winds have shaken; the unap-  
peasable host  
Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's  
feet.

## INTO THE TWILIGHT

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,  
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;  
Laugh heart again in the gray twilight,  
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,  
Dew ever shining and twilight gray;  
Though hope fall from you and love decay,  
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:  
For there the mystical brotherhood  
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood  
And river and stream work out their will;

And God stands winding His lonely horn,  
And time and the world are ever in flight ;  
And love is less kind than the gray twilight,  
And hope is less dear than the dew of the  
morn.

## THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I went out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And some one called me by my name:

It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands ;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

## THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER

I rise in the dawn, and I kneel and blow  
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;  
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep  
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;  
And the young lie long and dream in their bed  
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and  
head,  
And their day goes over in idleness,  
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:  
While I must work because I am old,  
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

## THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,  
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;  
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,  
My brother in Moharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin :  
They read in their books of prayer ;  
I read in my book of songs  
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,  
To Peter sitting in state,

He will smile on the three old spirits,  
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,  
Save by an evil chance,  
And the merry love the fiddle  
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,  
They will all come up to me,  
With "Here is the fiddler of Dooney!"  
And dance like a wave of the sea.

## THE HEART OF THE WOMAN

O what to me the little room  
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;  
He bade me out into the gloom,  
And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother's care,  
The house where I was safe and warm;  
The shadowy blossom of my hair  
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,  
I am no more with life and death,  
My heart upon his warm heart lies,  
My breath is mixed into his breath.

THE LOVER MOURNS FOR THE LOSS  
OF LOVE

Pale brows, still hands and dim hair,  
I had a beautiful friend  
And dreamed that the old despair  
Would end in love in the end :  
She looked in my heart one day  
And saw your image was there ;  
She has gone weeping away.

HE MOURNS FOR THE CHANGE THAT  
HAS COME UPON HIM AND HIS  
BELOVED AND LONGS FOR THE  
END OF THE WORLD

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with  
no horns !

I have been changed to a hound with one red  
ear ;

I have been in the Path of Stones and the  
Wood of Thorns,

For somebody hid hatred and hope and de-  
sire and fear

Under my feet that they follow you night and  
day.

A man with a hazel wand came without  
sound;

He changed me suddenly; I was looking an-  
other way;

And now my calling is but the calling of a  
hound;

And Time and Birth and Change are hurry-  
ing by.

I would that the Boar without bristles had  
come from the West

And had rooted the sun and moon and stars  
out of the sky

And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turn-  
ing to his rest.

HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes  
a-shake,

Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes  
glimmering white;

The North unfolds above them clinging,  
creeping night,

The East her hidden joy before the morning  
break,

The West weeps in pale dew and sighs pass-  
ing away,

The South is pouring down roses of crimson  
fire :

O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless  
Desire,

The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy  
clay:

Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your  
heart beat

Over my heart, and your hair fall over my  
breast,

Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight  
of rest,

And hiding their tossing manes and their  
tumultuous feet.

## HE REPROVES THE CURLEW

O, curlew, cry no more in the air,  
Or only to the waters in the West;  
Because your crying brings to my mind  
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair  
That was shaken out over my breast:  
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

## HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

When my arms wrap you round I press  
My heart upon the loveliness  
That has long faded from the world;  
The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled  
In shadowy pools, when armies fled;  
The love-tales wrought with silken thread  
By dreaming ladies upon cloth  
That has made fat the murderous moth;  
The roses that of old time were  
Woven by ladies in their hair,  
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore  
Through many a sacred corridor  
Where such gray clouds of incense rose

That only the gods' eyes did not close :  
For that pale breast and lingering hand  
Come from a more dream-heavy land,  
A more dream-heavy hour than this ;  
And when you sigh from kiss to kiss  
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,  
For hours when all must fade like dew  
But flame on flame, deep under deep,  
Throne over throne, where in half sleep  
Their swords upon their iron knees  
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

## A POET TO HIS BELOVED

I bring you with reverent hands  
The books of my numberless dreams;  
White woman that passion has worn  
As the tide wears the dove-gray sands,  
And with heart more old than the horn  
That is brimmed from the pale fire of time.  
White woman with numberless dreams  
I bring you my passionate rhyme.

## HE GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,  
And bind up every wandering tress;  
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:  
It worked at them, day out, day in,  
Building a sorrowful loveliness  
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,  
And bind up your long hair and sigh;  
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;  
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,  
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,  
Live but to light your passing feet.

TO MY HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO  
FEAR

Be you still, be you still, trembling heart;  
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:  
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,*  
*And the winds that blow through the starry ways,*  
*Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood*  
*Cover over and hide, for he has no part*  
*With the proud, majestical multitude.*

## THE CAP AND BELLS

The jester walked in the garden :  
The garden had fallen still ;  
He bade his soul rise upward  
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,  
When owls began to call :  
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking  
Of a quiet and light footfall ;

But the young queen would not listen ;  
She rose in her pale night gown ;

She drew in the heavy casement  
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,  
When the owls called out no more;  
In a red and quivering garment  
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming,  
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;  
But she took up her fan from the table  
And waved it off on the air.

“I have cap and bells,” he pondered,  
“I will send them to her and die;”  
And when the morning whitened  
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,  
Under a cloud of her hair,  
And her red lips sang them a love song:  
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,  
And the heart and the soul came through,  
To her right hand came the red one,  
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,  
A chattering wise and sweet,  
And her hair was a folded flower  
And the quiet of love in her feet.

## THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather:  
    unknown spears

Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened  
    eyes,

And then the clash of fallen horsemen and  
    the cries

Of unknown perishing armies beat about my  
    ears.

We who still labour by the cromlec on the  
    shore,

The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks  
    drowned in dew,

Being weary of the world's empires, bow down  
to you

Master of the still stars and of the flaming  
door.

## THE LOVER ASKS FORGIVENESS BE- CAUSE OF HIS MANY MOODS

If this importunate heart trouble your peace  
With words lighter than air,  
Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and  
cease;

Crumple the rose in your hair;  
And cover your lips with odorous twilight  
and say,

“O Hearts of wind-blown flame !  
O Winds, elder than changing of night and  
day,

That murmuring and longing came,  
From marble cities loud with tabors of old  
In dove-gray faery lands ;

From battle banners fold upon purple fold,  
Queens wrought with glimmering hands;  
That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn  
face

Above the wandering tide;  
And lingered in the hidden desolate place,  
Where the last Phœnix died  
And wrapped the flames above his holy head;  
And still murmur and long:  
O Piteous Hearts, changing till change be  
dead

In a tumultuous song:"  
And cover the pale blossoms of your breast  
With your dim heavy hair,  
And trouble with a sigh for all things long-  
ing for rest  
The odorous twilight there.

HE TELLS OF A VALLEY FULL OF  
LOVERS

I dreamed that I stood in a valley, and amid  
sighs,

For happy lovers passed two by two where I  
stood;

And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily  
out of the wood

With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-  
dimmed eyes:

I cried in my dream "*O women, bid the young  
men lay*

*Their heads on your knees, and drown their  
eyes with your hair,*

*Or remembering hers they will find no other*

*face fair*

*Till all the valleys of the world have been with-*

*ered away."*

## HE TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY

O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes  
The poets labouring all their days  
To build a perfect beauty in rhyme  
Are overthrown by a woman's gaze  
And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:  
And therefore my heart will bow, when dew  
Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,  
Before the unlabouring stars and you.

## HE HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE

I wander by the edge  
Of this desolate lake  
Where wind cries in the sedge  
*Until the axle break*  
*That keeps the stars in their round,*  
*And hands hurl in the deep*  
*The banners of East and West,*  
*And the girdle of light is unbound,*  
*Your breast will not lie by the breast*  
*Of your beloved in sleep.*

HE THINKS OF THOSE WHO HAVE  
SPOKEN EVIL OF HIS BELOVED

Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair,  
And dream about the great and their pride ;  
They have spoken against you everywhere,  
But weigh this song with the great and their  
pride ;

I made it out of a mouthful of air,  
Their children's children shall say they have  
lied.

## THE BLESSED

Cumhal called out, bending his head,  
Till Dathi came and stood,  
With a blink in his eyes at the cave mouth,  
Between the wind and the wood.

And Cumhal said, bending his knees,  
“I have come by the windy way  
To gather the half of your blessedness  
And learn to pray when you pray.

“I can bring you salmon out of the streams  
And heron out of the skies.”  
But Dathi folded his hands and smiled  
With the secrets of God in his eyes.

And Cumhal saw like a drifting smoke  
All manner of blessed souls,  
Women and children, young men with books,  
And old men with croziers and stoles.

“Praise God and God’s mother,” Dathi said,  
“For God and God’s mother have sent  
The blessedest souls that walk in the world  
To fill your heart with content.”

“And which is the blessedest,” Cumhal said,  
“Where all are comely and good ?  
Is it these that with golden thuribles  
Are singing about the wood ?”

“My eyes are blinking,” Dathi said,  
“With the secrets of God half blind,

But I can see where the wind goes  
And follow the way of the wind;

“And blessedness goes where the wind goes,  
And when it is gone we are dead;  
I see the blessedlest soul in the world  
And he nods a drunken head.

“O blessedness comes in the night and the day  
And whither the wise heart knows;  
And one has seen in the redness of wine  
The Incorruptible Rose,

“That drowsily drops faint leaves on him  
And the sweetness of desire,  
While time and the world are ebbing away  
In twilights of dew and of fire.”

## THE SECRET ROSE

Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose,  
Enfold me in my hour of hours; where those  
Who sought thee in the Holy Sepulchre,  
Or in the wine vat, dwell beyond the stir  
And tumult of defeated dreams; and deep  
Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep  
Men have named beauty. Thy great leaves  
enfold  
The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and  
gold  
Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose  
eyes  
Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder  
rise

In druid vapour and make the torches dim ;  
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died ; and him  
Who met Fand walking among flaming dew  
By a gray shore where the wind never blew,  
And lost the world and Emer for a kiss ;  
And him who drove the gods out of their liss,  
And till a hundred morns had flowered red,  
Feasted and wept the barrows of his dead ;  
And the proud dreaming king who flung the  
crown  
And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown  
Dwelt among wine-stained wanderers in deep  
woods ;  
And him who sold tillage, and house, and  
goods,  
And sought through lands and islands num-  
berless years,

Until he found with laughter and with tears,  
A woman, of so shining loveliness,  
That men threshed corn at midnight by a  
tress,

A little stolen tress. I, too, await  
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.  
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,  
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and  
die?

Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind  
blows,  
Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose ?

THE LOVER MOURNS BECAUSE OF  
HIS WANDERINGS

O where is our Mother of Peace  
Nodding her purple hood ?  
For the winds that awakened the stars  
Are blowing through my blood.  
  
I would that the death-pale deer  
Had come through the mountain side,  
And trampled the mountain away,  
And drunk up the murmuring tide ;  
For the winds that awakened the stars  
Are blowing through my blood,  
And our Mother of Peace has forgot me  
Under her purple hood.

## THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION

When the flaming lute-thronged angelic door  
is wide ;  
When an immortal passion breathes in mor-  
tal clay ;  
Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited  
thorns, the way  
Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in  
palm and side,  
The hyssop-heavy sponge, the flowers by  
Kidron stream :  
We will bend down and loosen our hair over  
you,

That it may drop faint perfume, and be  
heavy with dew,  
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate  
dream.

## THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR OLD FRIENDS

Though you are in your shining days,  
Voices among the crowd  
And new friends busy with your praise,  
Be not unkind or proud,  
But think about old friends the most:  
Time's bitter flood will rise,  
Your beauty perish and be lost  
For all eyes but these eyes.

A LOVER SPEAKS TO THE HEARERS  
OF HIS SONGS IN COMING DAYS

O, women, kneeling by your altar rails long  
hence,

When songs I wove for my beloved hide the  
prayer,

And smoke from this dead heart drifts through  
the violet air

And covers away the smoke of myrrh and  
frankincense;

Bend down and pray for the great sin I wove  
in song,

Till Mary of the wounded heart cry a sweet  
cry,

And call to my beloved and me: "No longer  
fly  
Amid the hovering, piteous, penitential  
throng."

## THE POET PLEADS WITH THE ELEMEN- TAL POWERS

The Powers whose name and shape no living  
creature knows

Have pulled the Immortal Rose;  
And though the Seven Lights bowed in their  
dance and wept,

The Polar Dragon slept,  
His heavy rings uncoiled from glimmering  
deep to deep :

When will he wake from sleep ?

Great Powers of falling wave and wind and  
windy fire,

**270 HE PLEADS WITH ELEMENTAL POWERS**

With your harmonious choir  
Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,  
That my old care may cease;  
Unfold your flaming wings and cover out of  
    sight  
The nets of day and night.

Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no  
    longer be  
Like the pale cup of the sea,  
When winds have gathered and sun and moon  
    burned dim  
Above its cloudy rim ;  
But let a gentle silence wrought with music  
    flow  
Whither her footsteps go.

## HE WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD

Were you but lying cold and dead,  
And lights were paling out of the West,  
You would come hither, and bend your head,  
And I would lay my head on your breast;  
And you would murmur tender words,  
Forgiving me, because you were dead :  
Nor would you rise and hasten away,  
Though you have the will of the wild birds,  
But know your hair was bound and wound  
About the stars and moon and sun :  
O would beloved that you lay  
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,  
While lights were paling one by one.

HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF  
HEAVEN

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

HE THINKS OF HIS PAST GREATNESS  
WHEN A PART OF THE CONSTELLA-  
TIONS OF HEAVEN

I have drunk ale from the Country of the  
Young

And weep because I know all things now:  
I have been a hazel tree and they hung  
The Pilot Star and the Crooked Plough  
Among my leaves in times out of mind:  
I became a rush that horses tread:  
I became a man, a hater of the wind,  
Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that his  
head

Would not lie on the breast or his lips on the  
hair

Of the woman that he loves, until he dies;  
Although the rushes and the fowl of the air  
Cry of his love with their pitiful cries.



**IN THE SEVEN WOODS**

Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart  
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great  
Archer,  
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs  
A cloudy quiver over Parc-na-Lee.

August, 1902.

## THE ARROW

I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,  
Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.  
There's no man may look upon her, no man;  
As when newly grown to be a woman,

Blossom pale, she pulled down the pale  
blossom

At the moth hour and hid it in her bosom.  
This beauty's kinder yet for a reason  
I could weep that the old is out of season.

## THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

One that is ever kind said yesterday :

“ Your well beloved’s hair has threads of grey,  
And little shadows come about her eyes;  
Time can but make it easier to be wise,  
Though now it’s hard, till trouble is at an end ;  
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend.”

But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain ;  
Time can but make her beauty over again,  
Because of that great nobleness of hers :  
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs  
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these  
ways,

When all the wild summer was in her gaze.

O heart ! O heart ! if she’d but turn her head,  
You’d know the folly of being comforted.

## OLD MEMORY

I thought to fly to her when the end of day  
Awakens an old memory, and say,  
“Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and  
kind,  
It might call up a new age, calling to mind  
The queens that were imagined long ago,  
Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough  
Through the long years of youth, and who  
would have thought  
It all, and more than it all, would come to  
naught,  
And that dear words meant nothing?” But  
enough,

For when we have blamed the wind we can

blame love:

Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said

That would be harsh for children that have

strayed.

## NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART

Never give all the heart, for love  
Will hardly seem worth thinking of  
To passionate women, if it seem .  
Certain, and they never dream  
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;  
For everything that's lovely is  
But a brief dreamy kind delight.  
O never give the heart outright  
For they, for all smooth lips can say,  
Have given their hearts up to the play.  
And who could play it well enough  
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?  
He that made this knows all the cost  
For he gave all his heart and lost.

## THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the  
birds,

“Let peewit call and curlew cry where they  
will,

I long for your merry and tender and pitiful  
words,

For the roads are unending, and there is no  
place to my mind.”

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy  
hill,

And I fell asleep upon lonely Echtge of  
streams.

No boughs have withered because of the  
wintry wind;  
The boughs have withered because I have  
told them my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches  
take,  
Who come with their crowns of pearl and  
their spindles of wool,  
And their secret smile, out of the depths  
of the lake;  
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the  
Danaan kind  
Wind and unwind their dances when the  
light grows cool  
On the island lawns, their feet where the  
pale foam gleams.

No boughs have withered because of the  
wintry wind;  
The boughs have withered because I have told  
them my dreams.

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly

round

Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they  
fly.

A king and a queen are wandering there, and  
the sound

Has made them so happy and hopeless, so  
deaf and so blind

With wisdom, they wander till all the years  
have gone by;

I know, and the curlew and peewit on Echtge  
of streams.

No boughs have withered because of the wintry  
wind;  
The boughs have withered because I have  
told them my dreams.

## ADAM'S CURSE

We sat together at one summer's end,  
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,  
And you and I, and talked of poetry.

I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;  
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,  
Our stitching and unstitching has been  
naught.

Better go down upon your marrow bones  
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break  
stones

Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;

For to articulate sweet sounds together  
Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
The martyrs call the world."

That woman then  
Murmured with her young voice, for whose  
mild sake  
There's many a one shall find out all heartache  
In finding that it's young and mild and low:  
"There is one thing that all we women know,  
Although we never heard of it at school —  
That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing  
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.

There have been lovers who thought love  
should be  
So much compounded of high courtesy  
That they would sigh and quote with learned  
looks  
Precedents out of beautiful old books;  
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;  
We saw the last embers of daylight die,  
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky  
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell  
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell  
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears;  
That you were beautiful, and that I strove

To love you in the old highway of love;  
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd  
grown  
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

## RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND

The old brown thorn trees break in two high  
over Cummen Strand,  
Under a bitter black wind that blows from  
the left hand;  
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black  
wind and dies,  
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame  
out of the eyes  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over  
Knocknarea,  
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all  
that Maeve can say.

Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our  
hearts abeat;  
But we have all bent low and low and kissed  
the quiet feet  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on  
Clooth-na-Bare,  
For the wet winds are blowing out of the  
clinging air;  
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our  
blood  
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy  
Rood  
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

## THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEM- SELVES IN THE WATER

I heard the old, old men say,

“Everything alters,

And one by one we drop away.”

They had hands like claws, and their knees

Were twisted like the old thorn trees

By the waters.

I heard the old, old men say,

“All that’s beautiful drifts away

Like the waters.”

## UNDER THE MOON

I have no happiness in dreaming of Bryce-linde,

Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,

Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while;

Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind,

Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart;

Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's

Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived ones;  
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates apart,  
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn,  
To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier :  
Therein are many queens like Branwen and Guinivere ;  
And Niamh and Laban and Fand, who could change to an otter or fawn,  
And the wood-woman, whose lover was changed to a blue-eyed hawk ;  
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun, or shore,  
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,

I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear  
their mournful talk.

Because of a story I heard under the thin horn  
Of the third moon, that hung between the  
night and the day,

To dream of women whose beauty was folded  
in dismay,

Even in an old story, is a burden not to be  
borne.

## CHORUS FOR A PLAY

*It is sung at the entrance of Deirdre into the House of the Red Branch by certain wandering musicians. She comes to the threshold at the end of the second verse, and they, seeing her whispering to Naoise who is beside her, think that she is busy with her love, not knowing that she is hesitating in fear.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. Why is it, Queen Edain  
said,

If I do but climb the stair  
To the tower overhead  
When the winds are calling there,

Or the gannets calling out  
In waste places of the sky,  
There's so much to think about  
That I cry, that I cry?

ANOTHER MUSICIAN. But her goodman  
answered her:

Love would be a thing of naught  
Had not all his limbs a stir  
Born out of immoderate thought;  
Were he anything by half;  
Were his measures running dry.  
Lovers if they may not laugh  
Have to cry, have to cry.

ALL THE MUSICIANS. But is Edain worth  
a song

Now the hunt begins anew?  
Praise the beautiful and strong,

Praise the redness of the yew,  
Praise the blossoming apple stem:  
Yet our silence had been wise;  
What is all our praise to them  
That have one another's eyes?

THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING  
ON THE PSALTERIES AND  
THEMSELVES

THREE VOICES TOGETHER. Hurry to bless  
the hands that play,

The mouths that speak, the notes and strings,  
O masters of the glittering town !

O ! lay the shrilly trumpet down,  
Though drunken with the flags that sway  
Over the ramparts and the towers,  
And with the waving of your wings.

FIRST VOICE. Maybe they linger by the  
way.

One gathers up his purple gown ;

One leans and mutters by the wall —

He dreads the weight of mortal hours.

SECOND VOICE. O no, O no! they hurry  
down

Like plovers that have heard the call.

THIRD VOICE. O kinsmen of the Three in  
One,

O kinsmen bless the hands that play.

The notes they waken shall live on

When all this heavy history's done;

Our hands, our hands must ebb away.

THREE VOICES TOGETHER. The proud and  
careless notes live on,

But bless our hands that ebb away.

## THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

There's many a strong farmer  
Whose heart would break in two,  
If he could see the townland  
That we are riding to;  
Boughs have their fruit and blossom  
At all times of the year;  
Rivers are running over  
With red beer and brown beer.  
An old man plays the bagpipes  
In a golden and silver wood;  
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,  
Are dancing in the crowd.

The little fox he murmured,  
“O what of the world’s bane?”  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
“O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world’s bane.”

When their hearts are so high  
That they would come to blows,  
They unhook their heavy swords  
From golden and silver boughs;  
But all that are killed in battle  
Awaken to life again:  
It is lucky that their story  
Is not known among men.

For O, the strong farmers  
That would let the spade lie,  
Their hearts would be like a cup  
That somebody had drunk dry.

The little fox he murmured,  
“O what of the world’s bane?”  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
“O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world’s bane.”

Michael will unhook his trumpet  
From a bough overhead,  
And blow a little noise  
When the supper has been spread.

Gabriel will come from the water  
With a fish tail, and talk  
Of wonders that have happened  
On wet roads where men walk,  
And lift up an old horn  
Of hammered silver, and drink  
Till he has fallen asleep  
Upon the starry brink.

The little fox he murmured,  
“O what of the world’s bane?”  
The sun was laughing sweetly,  
The moon plucked at my rein;  
But the little red fox murmured,  
“O do not pluck at his rein,  
He is riding to the townland  
That is the world’s bane.”

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN  
MAEVE



## THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

Maeve the great queen was pacing to and fro,  
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,  
In her high house at Cruachan; the long  
hearth,

Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed  
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the  
rushes,

Or on the benches underneath the walls,  
In comfortable sleep; all living slept  
But that great queen, who more than half  
the night

Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.

Though now in her old age, in her young age

She had been beautiful in that old way  
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is  
gone,  
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears  
all  
But soft beauty and indolent desire.  
She could have called over the rim of the world  
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,  
And yet had been great bodied and great  
limbed,  
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;  
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,  
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried  
flax,  
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,  
Sudden and laughing.

O unquiet heart,

Why do you praise another, praising her,  
As if there were no tale but your own tale  
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound ?  
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen  
Who has been buried some two thousand  
years ?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose  
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long  
clamour  
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their  
hooks ;  
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some  
power  
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness ;  
And wondering who of the many changing  
Sidhe

Had come as in the old times to counsel her,  
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being  
old,

To that small chamber by the outer gate.  
The porter slept, although he sat upright  
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.  
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing  
noise

Broke from his parted lips and broke again,  
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,  
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say  
Who of the wandering many-changing ones  
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to  
say

Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs  
More still than they had been for a good  
month,

He had fallen asleep, and, though he had  
dreamed nothing,  
He could remember when he had had fine  
dreams.

It was before the time of the great war  
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown  
Bull.

She turned away; he turned again to sleep  
That no god troubled now, and, wondering  
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,  
Maeve walked through that great hall, and  
with a sigh  
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,  
Remembering that she too had seemed divine  
To many thousand eyes, and to her own  
One that the generations had long waited

That work too difficult for mortal hands  
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up

She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,  
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,  
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,  
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,  
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,  
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice  
Of those that it may be can never age.  
He said, "High Queen of Cruachan and Magh Ai,  
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you."

And with glad voice Maeve answered him,

“What King

Of the far wandering shadows has come to  
me?

As in the old days when they would come and  
go

About my threshold to counsel and to help.”

The parted lips replied, “I seek your help,  
For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love.”

“How may a mortal whose life gutters out  
Help them that wander with hand clasping  
hand,

Their haughty images that cannot wither  
For all their beauty’s like a hollow dream,  
Mirrored in streams that neither hail nor rain  
Nor the cold North has troubled?”

He replied

"I am from those rivers and I bid you call  
The children of the Maines out of sleep,  
And set them digging into Anbual's hill.  
We shadows, while they uproot his earthy  
house,  
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off  
Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.  
I helped your fathers when they built these  
walls,  
And I would have your help in my great need,  
Queen of high Cruachan."

"I obey your will  
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:  
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,  
Our giver of good counsel and good luck."  
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath

Could but awaken sadly upon lips  
That happier breath had moved, her husband  
turned  
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;  
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,  
Came to the threshold of the painted house,  
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried  
aloud,  
Until the pillared dark began to stir  
With shouting and the clang of unhooked  
arms.

She told them of the many-changing ones;  
And all that night, and all through the next  
day  
To middle night, they dug into the hill.  
At middle night great cats with silver claws,

Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,  
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds  
With long white bodies came out of the air  
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades,

and stood

With quaking joints and terror strucken faces,  
Till Maeve called out: "These are but com-  
mon men.

The Maines' children have not dropped their  
spades,

Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,  
Casts up a show and the winds answer it  
With holy shadows." Her high heart was  
glad,

And when the uproar ran along the grass

She followed with light footfall in the midst,  
'Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had  
stood

With equal courage in that whirling rout;  
For you, although you've not her wandering  
heart,

Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.

For there is no high story about queens  
In any ancient book but tells of you;  
And when I've heard how they grew old and  
died,

Or fell into unhappiness, I've said :  
"She will grow old and die, and she has  
wept!"

And when I'd write it out anew, the words,

Half crazy with the thought, She too has  
wept!

Outrun the measure.

I'd tell of that great queen  
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn  
Until two lovers came out of the air  
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,  
About whose face birds wagged their fiery  
wings,  
Said: "Aengus and his sweetheart give their  
thanks  
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing  
all  
In owing them the bride-bed that gives  
peace."

Then Maeve: "O Aengus, Master of all lovers,  
A thousand years ago you held high talk

With the first kings of many pillared Cruachan.  
O when will you grow weary?"

They had vanished;  
But out of the dark air over her head there  
came  
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.



**BAILE AND AILLINN**



## BAILE AND AILLINN

ARGUMENT. *Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.*

I hardly hear the curlew cry,  
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,  
Before my thoughts begin to run  
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,  
Baile, who had the honey mouth;  
And that mild woman of the south,  
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.  
Their love was never drowned in care

Of this or that thing, nor grew cold  
Because their bodies had grown old.  
Being forbid to marry on earth,  
They blossomed to immortal mirth.

About the time when Christ was born,  
When the long wars for the White Horn  
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,  
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some  
Called rather Baile Little-Land,  
Rode out of Emain with a band  
Of harpers and young men; and they  
Imagined, as they struck the way  
To many pastured Muirthemne,  
That all things fell out happily,  
And there, for all that fools had said,  
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

They found an old man running there:  
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;  
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;  
He had puddle water in his shoes;  
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,  
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

*O wandering birds and rushy beds,*  
*You put such folly in our heads*  
*With all this crying in the wind;*  
*No common love is to our mind,*  
*And our poor Kate or Nan is less*  
*Than any whose unhappiness*  
*Awoke the harp-strings long ago.*  
*Yet they that know all things but know*  
*That all life had to give us is*  
*A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.*

*Who was it put so great a scorn  
In the grey reeds that night and morn  
Are trodden and broken by the herds,  
And in the light bodies of birds  
That north wind tumbles to and fro  
And pinches among hail and snow?*

That runner said: "I am from the south;  
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,  
To tell him how the girl Aillinn  
Rode from the country of her kin,  
And old and young men rode with her:  
For all that country had been astir  
If anybody half as fair  
Had chosen a husband anywhere  
But where it could see her every day.  
When they had ridden a little way

An old man caught the horse's head  
With : ' You must home again, and wed  
With somebody in your own land.'  
A young man cried and kissed her hand,  
' O lady, wed with one of us ;'  
And when no face grew piteous  
For any gentle thing she spake,  
She fell and died of the heart-break."

Because a lover's heart's worn out,  
Being tumbled and blown about  
By its own blind imagining,  
And will believe that anything  
That is bad enough to be true, is true,  
Baile's heart was broken in two ;  
And he being laid upon green boughs,  
Was carried to the goodly house

Where the Hound of Ulad sat before  
The brazen pillars of his door,  
His face bowed low to weep the end  
Of the harper's daughter and her friend.  
For although years had passed away  
He always wept them on that day,  
For on that day they had been betrayed ;  
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid  
Under a cairn of sleepy stone  
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,  
Although he is carrying stone, but two  
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

*We hold because our memory is  
So full of that thing and of this  
That out of sight is out of mind.  
But the grey rush under the wind*

*And the grey bird with crooked bill  
Have such long memories, that they still  
Remember Deirdre and her man;  
And when we walk with Kate or Nan  
About the windy water side,  
Our heart can hear the voices chide.  
How could we be so soon content,  
Who know the way that Naoise went?  
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,  
Who being lovely was so wise —  
Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.*

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,  
Gathering his cloak about him, run  
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids,  
Who amid leafy lights and shades  
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace

Their bodices in some dim place  
When they had come to the marriage bed ;  
And harpers, pondering with bowed head  
A music that had thought enough  
Of the ebb of all things to make love  
Grow gentle without sorrowings ;  
And leather-coated men with slings  
Who peered about on every side ;  
And amid leafy light he cried :  
“ He is well out of wind and wave ;  
They have heaped the stones above his grave  
In Muirthemne, and over it  
In changeless Ogham letters writ —

*Baile, that was of Rury's seed.*

But the gods long ago decreed  
No waiting maid should ever spread

Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,  
For they should clip and clip again  
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.  
Therefore it is but little news  
That put this hurry in my shoes."

And hurrying to the south, he came  
To that high hill the herdsmen name  
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because  
Some god or king had made the laws  
That held the land together there,  
In old times among the clouds of the air.

That old man climbed ; the day grew dim ;  
Two swans came flying up to him,  
Linked by a gold chain each to each,  
And with low murmuring laughing speech

Alighted on the windy grass.

They knew him : his changed body was  
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings  
Were hovering over the harp-strings  
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove  
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them ? fish that swim,  
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim  
By a broad water-lily leaf ;  
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf  
Forgotten at the threshing place ;  
Or birds lost in the one clear space  
Of morning light in a dim sky ;  
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,  
Or the door pillars of one house,  
Or two sweet blossoming apple boughs

That have one shadow on the ground;  
Or the two strings that made one sound  
Where that wise harper's finger ran.  
For this young girl and this young man  
Have happiness without an end,  
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass  
The towery gates of Gorias,  
And Findrias and Falias,  
And long-forgotten Murias,  
Among the giant kings whose hoard  
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword  
Was robbed before Earth gave the wheat;  
Wandering from broken street to street  
They come where some huge watcher is,  
And tremble with their love and kiss.

They know undying things, for they  
Wander where earth withers away,  
Though nothing troubles the great streams  
But light from the pale stars, and gleams  
From the holy orchards, where there is  
none

But fruit that is of precious stone,  
Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them : they eat  
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat,  
Who when night thickens are afloat  
On dappled skins in a glass boat,  
Far out under a windless sky ;  
While over them birds of Aengus fly,  
And over the tiller and the prow,  
And waving white wings to and fro

Awaken wanderings of light air  
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,  
A yew tree where his body lay ;  
But a wild apple hid the grass  
With its sweet blossom where hers was ;  
And being in good heart, because  
A better time had come again  
After the deaths of many men,  
And that long fighting at the ford,  
They wrote on tablets of thin board,  
Made of the apple and the yew,  
All the love stories that they knew.

*Let rush and bird cry out their fill  
Of the harper's daughter if they will,*

*Beloved, I am not afraid of her.  
She is not wiser nor lovelier,  
And you are more high of heart than she,  
For all her wanderings over-sea ;  
But I'd have birds and rush forget  
Those other two ; for never yet  
Has lover lived, but longed to wife  
Like them that are no more alive.*

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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